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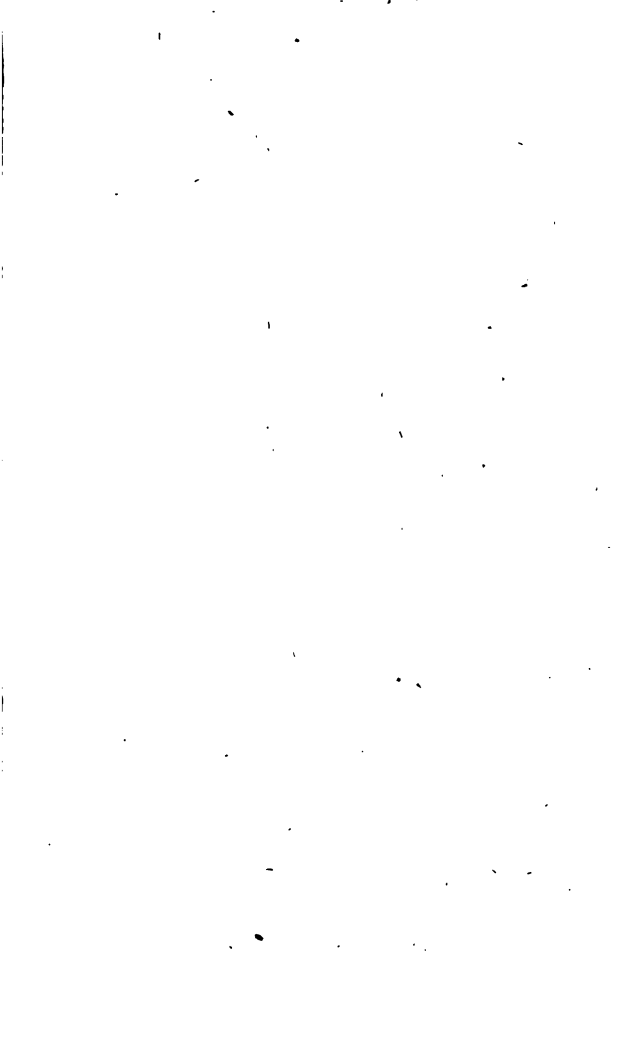
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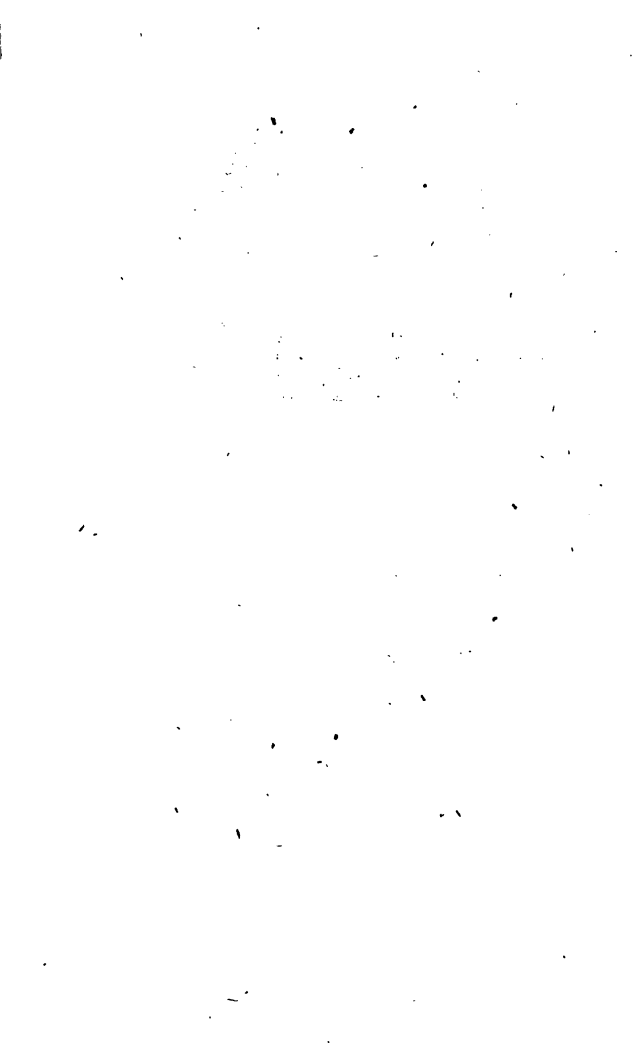






No 29

George Chan





THE WORKS
OF
JAMES BEATTIE, LL. D.
VOLUME VI.



ESSAYS

On the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism.

On Poetry and Musick, as

they affect the Mind.

On Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition.

On the Utility of Classical Learning.

BY JAMES BEATTIE, LL. D.

Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logick in the Marischal
College and University of Aberdeen.

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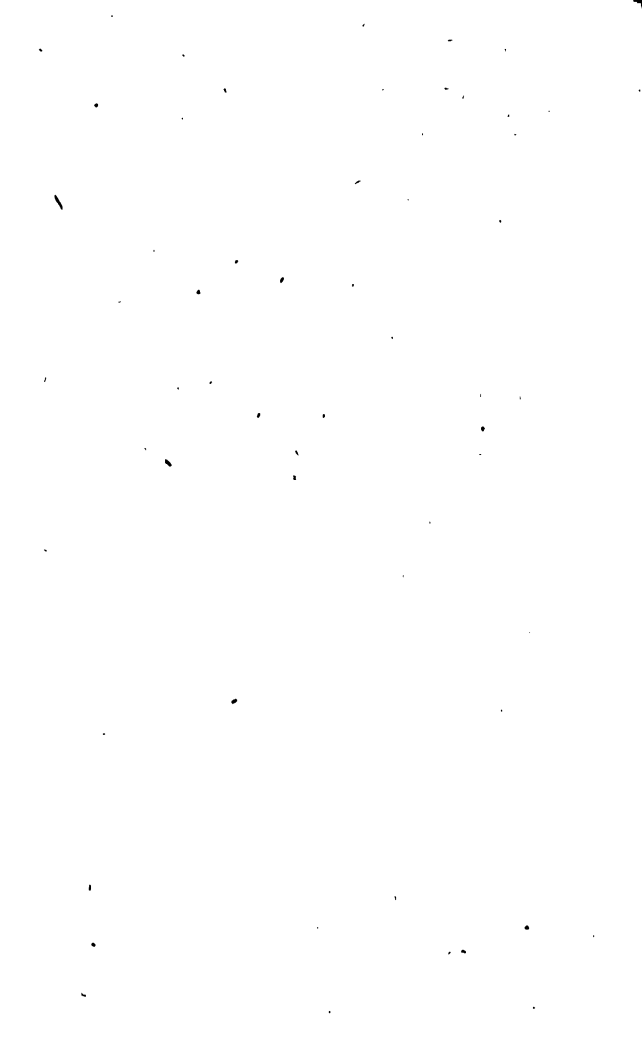
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AN ESSAY
ON
POETRY AND MUSICK,
AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND.



AN ESSAY
ON
POETRY AND MUSICK.

PART II.

OF THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY.

HAVING finished what I intended to say on the general nature of poetry, as an imitative art, I proceed to consider the INSTRUMENT which it employs in its imitations; or, in other words to explain the general nature of POETICK LANGUAGE. For *language* is the poet's instrument of imitation, as *sound* is the musician's, and *colour* the painter's. My conclusions on this part of the subject will be found to terminate in the principles already laid down.

Words in poetry are chosen, first, for their *sense*; and, secondly, for their *sound*. That the first of these grounds of choice is the more excellent, nobody can deny. He who in literary

matters prefers sound to sense, is a fool. Yet sound is to be attended to, even in prose; and in verse demands particular attention. I shall consider poetical language, first, as **SIGNIFICANT**; and, secondly, as **SUSCEPTIBLE OF HARMONY**.

CHAPTER I.

Of Poetical Language, considered as significant.

IF, as I have endeavoured to prove, poetry be imitative of nature, poetical fictions of real events, poetical images of real appearances in the visible creation, and poetical personages of real human characters; it would seem to follow, that the *language of poetry* must be an imitation of the *language of nature*. For nothing but what is supposed to be natural can please; and language, as well as fable, imagery, and moral description, may displease, by being unnatural. What then is meant by *natural language*? This comes to be our first inquiry.



SECTION I.

An idea of Natural Language.

THE term *natural language* has sometimes been used by philosophers to denote those tones of the human voice, attitudes of the body, and

configurations of the features, which, being *naturally* expressive of certain emotions of the soul, are universal among mankind, and every where understood. Thus anger, fear, pity, adoration, joy, contempt, and almost every other passion, has a look, attitude, and tone of voice, peculiar to itself; which would seem to be the effect, not of men imitating one another, but of the soul operating upon the body; and which, when well expressed in a picture or statue, or when it appears in human behaviour, is understood by all mankind, as the external sign of that passion which it is for the most part observed to accompany. In this acceptation, *natural language* is contradistinguished to those articulate voices to which the name of *speech* has been appropriated; and which are also universal among mankind, though different in different nations; but derive all their meaning from human compact and *artifice*, and are not understood except by those who have been instructed in the use of them. But in this inquiry the term *natural language* denotes that use of speech, or of *artificial language*, which is suitable to the speaker and to the occasion. "Proper words in proper places," is Swift's definition of a good style; and may with equal propriety, serve for a definition of that style, or mode of language,

which is here called *natural*, in contradistinction, not to *artificial* (itself being artificial) but to *unnatural*; and which it is the poet's business to imitate. I say, *to imitate*: for as poets (for a reason already given) copy nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection, wherein consistently with verisimilitude, and with the genius of their work, it may be supposed to be; and are therefore said to *imitate* nature, that is, to give a view of nature similar to, but somewhat different from the reality: so, in forming poetical language, they must take for their model human speech, not in that imperfect state wherein it is used on the common occasions of life, but in that state of perfection, whereof, consistently with verisimilitude, it may be supposed to be susceptible.

But, as we cannot estimate the perfection or imperfection of poetical imagery, till we know the natural appearance of the thing described; so neither can we judge of this perfection of human speech, till we have formed some idea of that quality of language which we express by the epithet *natural*. That some modes of language are more natural than others, and that one mode may be natural at one time which at another would be unnatural, must be evident even to those who never studied criticism. Would soft words, for example, be natural in

the mouth of a very angry man? or do even the vulgar expect blustering expressions from him who melts with pity or love or sorrow? Between groans and pain, tears and grief, laughter and jocularity, trembling and fear, the connexion is not more natural, than between certain sentiments of the human mind and certain modifications of human language.

Natural language and *good* language are not the same: and Swift's definition, which is equally applicable to both, will not perhaps be found to express adequately the characteristick of either. The qualities of good language are perspicuity, simplicity, elegance, energy, and harmony. But language may possess all these qualities, and yet not be natural. Would the Anacreontick or Ovidian simplicity be natural in the mouth of Achilles, upbraiding Agamemnon with his tyranny and injustice; or of Lear defying the tempestuous elements, and imprecating perdition upon his daughters? Would that perspicuity which we justly admire in Cato's soliloquy,* be accounted natural in Hamlet's,† by those who know, that the former is supposed to speak with the rationality of a philosopher, and the latter

* It must be so. Plato, thou reason'st well, &c.

† To be, or not to be, &c.

with the agitation of a young man tortured to madness with sorrow and love, disappointment and revenge? Would language so magnificent as that in which the sublime Othello speaks of the pomp and honours of war, be natural in the mouth of the soft, the humble, the broken-hearted Desdemona bewailing her unhappy fate? Or would the sonorous harmony of the dithyrambick song or epick poem, suit the simplicity of shepherds, contending in alternate verse, and praising their mistresses, putting forth riddles, or making remarks upon the weather? Yet language must always be so far simple as to have no superfluous decoration; so far perspicuous, as to let us see clearly what is meant; and so far elegant, as to give no ground to suspect the author of ignorance, or want of taste.

Good language is determinate and absolute. We know it wherever we meet with it; we may learn to speak and write it from books alone. Whether pronounced by a clown or a hero, a wise man or an idiot, language is still good if it be according to rule. But natural language is something not absolute but relative; and can be estimated by those only, who have studied men as well as books; and who attend to the real or

supposed character of the speaker, as well as to the import of what is spoken.

There are several particulars relating to the speaker which we must attend to, before we can judge whether his expression be natural. It is obvious, that his *temper* must be taken into the account. From the fiery and passionate we expect one sort of language, from the calm and moderate another. That impetuosity which is natural in Achilles, would in Sarpedon or Ulysses be quite the contrary; as the mellifluent copiousness of Nestor would ill become the blunt rusticity of Ajax. Those diversities of temper which make men think differently on the same occasion, will also make them speak the same thoughts in a different manner. And as the temper of the same man is not always uniform, but is variously affected by youth and old age, and by the prevalence of temporary passions; so neither will that style which is most natural to him be always uniform, but may be energetick or languid, abrupt or equable, figurative or plain, according to the passions or sentiments that may happen to predominate in his mind. And hence, to judge whether his language be natural, we must attend, not only to the habitual temper, but also to the *present passions*, and even to the *age* of the speaker. Nor should we overlook his

intellectual peculiarities. If his thoughts be confused or indistinct, his style must be immethodical and obscure; if the former be much diversified, the latter will be equally copious. The *external circumstances* of the speaker, his rank and fortune, his education and company, particularly the two last, have no little influence in characterising his style. A clown and a man of learning, a pedantick and a polite scholar, a husbandman and a soldier, a mechanick and a seaman, reciting the same narrative, will, each of them, adopt a peculiar mode of expression, suitable to the ideas that occupy his mind, and to the language he has been accustomed to speak and hear: and if a poet, who had occasion to introduce these characters in a comedy, were to give the same uniform colour of language to them all, the style of that comedy, however elegant, would be unnatural. Our language is also affected by the very thoughts we utter. When these are lofty or groveling, there is a correspondent elevation or meanness in the language. The style of a great man is generally simple, but seldom fails to partake of the dignity and energy of his sentiments. In Greece and Rome, the corruption of literature was a consequence of the corruption of manners; and the manly simplicity of the old writers disappeared, as the

nation became effeminate and servile. Horace and Longinus * scruple not to ascribe the decline of eloquence, in their days, to a littleness of mind, the effect of avarice and luxury. The words of Longinus are remarkable. "The truly eloquent (says he) must possess an exalted and noble mind; for it is not possible for those who have all their lives been employed in servile pursuits, to produce any thing worthy of immortal renown or general admiration." In fact, our words not only are the signs, but may be considered as the pictures of our thoughts. The same glow or faintness of colouring, the same consistency or incoherence, the same proportions of great and little, the same degrees of elevation, the same light and shade, that distinguish the one, will be found to characterise the other: and from such a character as Achilles or Othello we as naturally expect a bold, nervous, and animated phraseology, as a manly voice and commanding gesture. It is hardly necessary to add, that style, in order to be natural, must be adapted to the sex and to the nation of the speaker. These circumstances give a peculiarity to human thought, and must therefore diversify the modes of human language. I

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 322—332. Longinus, sect. 9. 44.

will not say, as some have done, that a lady is always distinguishable by her style and handwriting, as well as by her voice and features; but I believe it might be truly said, that female conversation, even when learned or philosophical, has, for the most part, an ease and a delicacy, which the greatest masters of language would find it difficult to imitate. The style that Shakspeare has given to Juliet's nurse, Mrs. Quickly, Desdemona, or Katharine, would not suit any male; nor the phraseology of Dogberry or Petruchio, Pistol or Falstaff, any female character. National peculiarities are also to be attended to by those who study natural language in its full extent. We should expect a copious and flowery style from an Asiatick monarch, and a concise and figurative expression from an American chief. A French marquis, and a country gentleman of England, would not use the same phrases on the same subject, even though they were speaking the same language with equal fluency. And a *valet-de-chambre* newly imported from Paris, or a Scotch footman who had been born and bred in Edinburgh, appearing in an English comedy, would be censured as an unnatural character, if the poet were to make him speak pure English.

May we not infer, from what has been said,

that "language is then according to nature, " when it is suitable to the supposed condition " of the speaker?" meaning by the word *condition*, not only the outward circumstances of *fortune, rank, employment, sex, age, and nation*, but also the internal temperature of the *understanding and passions*, as well as the peculiar nature of the *thoughts* that may happen to occupy the mind. Horace seems to have had this in view, when he said, that " if what is spoken on the " stage shall be unsuitable to the *fortunes* of the " speaker, both the learned and unlearned part " of the audience will be sensible of the *impropriety*: for that it is of great importance to " the poet to consider, whether the person " speaking be a slave or, a hero; a man of mature " age, or warm with the passions of youth; a " lady of rank, or a bustling nurse; a luxurious " Assyrian, or a cruel native of Colchis; a mercantile traveller, or a stationary husbandman; " an acute Argive, or a dull Beotian."*

But Horace's remark, it may be said, refers more immediately to the style of the drama; whereas we would extend it to poetry, and even to composition, in general. And it may be thought, that in those writings wherein the im-

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 112.

itation of human life is less perfect, as in the epick poem, or wherein the style is uniformly elevated and pure, as in history and tragedy, this rule of language is not attended to. In what respect, for example, can the style of Livy or Homer be said to be suitable to the condition of the speaker? Have we not, in each author, a great variety of speeches, ascribed to men of different nations, ranks, and characters; who are all, notwithstanding, made to utter a language, that is not only grammatical, but elegant and harmonious? Yet no reader is offended: and no critick ever said, that the style of Homer or Livy is unnatural.

The objection is plausible. But a right examination of it will be found not to weaken, but to confirm and illustrate the present doctrine. I say, then, that language is natural, when it is suited to the supposed condition and circumstances of the speaker. Now, in history, the speaker is no other than the historian himself; who claims the privilege of telling his tale in his own way; and of expressing the thoughts of other men, where he has occasion to record them, in his own language. All this we must allow to be natural, if we suppose him to be serious. For every man, who speaks without affectation, has a style and a manner peculiar to

himself. A person of learning and eloquence, recapitulating on any solemn occasion the speech of a clown, would not be thought in earnest if he did not express himself with his wonted propriety. It would be difficult, perhaps he would find it impossible, to imitate the hesitation, barbarisms, and broad accent, of the poor man; and if he were to do so, he would affront his audience, and, instead of being thought a natural speaker, or capable of conducting important business, would prove himself a mere buffoon. Now an historian is a person who assumes a character of great dignity, and addresses himself to a most respectable audience. He undertakes to communicate information, not to his equals only or inferiours; but to the greatest, and most learned men upon earth. He wishes them to listen to him, and to listen with pleasure, to believe his testimony, and treasure up his sayings as lessons of wisdom, to direct them in the conduct of life, and in the government of kingdoms. In so awful a presence, and with views so elevated, what style is it natural for him to assume? A style uniformly serious and elegant, clear, orderly, and emphatical, set off with modest ornaments to render it pleasing, yet plain and simple, and such as becomes a man whose chief concern it is to know and de-

liver the truth. The moralist and the preacher are in similar circumstances, and will naturally adopt a similar style: only a more sublime and more pathetick energy, and language still plainer than that of the historian, though not less pure, will with reason be expected from those, who pronounce the dictates of divine wisdom, and profess to instruct the meanest as well as the greatest of mankind, in matters of everlasting importance.

When a man for the publick amusement, assumes any character, it is not necessary, nor possible, for him to impose upon us so far as to make us believe him to be the very person he represents: but we have a right to expect that his behaviour shall not belie his pretensions in any thing material. With all his powers of incantation, Garrick himself will never be able to charm us into a belief, that he is really Macbeth: all that can be done he does; he speaks and acts just as if he were that person; and this is all that the publick requires of him. Were he to fall short, or rather (for we need not suppose what will never happen) were any other tragedian to fall short of our expectations, and plead, by way of excuse, that truly he was neither a king nor a traitor, neither an ambitious nor a valiant man, and therefore ought not to be blamed for

not acting as becomes one; we should more easily pardon the fault, than the apology. Now it is very true, that an epick poet is no more inspired than any other writer, and perhaps was never seriously believed to be so. But as he lays claim to inspiration; and before the whole world professes to display the most interesting and most marvellous events, to be particularly informed in regard to the thoughts as well as actions of men, and to know the affairs of invisible beings and the economy of unseen worlds; we have a right to expect from him a language as much elevated above that of history and philosophy, as his assumed character and pretensions are higher than those of the historian and philosopher. From such a man, supposed to be invested with such a character, we have indeed a right to require every possible perfection of human thought and language. And therefore, if he were to introduce mean persons talking in their own dialect, it would be as unnatural, as if a great orator, on the most solemn occasion, were to lisp and prattle like a child; or a hero to address his victorious army in the jargon of a gypsy or pickpocket.

In the epopee, the muse, or rather the poet, is supposed to speak from beginning to end; the incidental orations ascribed to Thersites or

Nestor, to Ulysses or Polypheme, to Ascanius or Eneas, to Satan or Raphael, not being delivered, as in tragedy, by the several speakers in their own persons, but rehearsed by the poet in the way of narrative. These orations, therefore, must not only be adapted to the characters of those to whom they are ascribed, and to the occasion upon which they are spoken, but must also partake of the supposed dignity of the poet's character: And if so, they must be elevated to the general pitch of the composition; even though they be said to have been uttered by persons from whom, in common life, elegance of style would not have been expected. And a certain degree of the same elevation, must adhere to every description in epick poetry, though the thing described should be comparatively unimportant: which is no more than we naturally look for, when an eloquent man, in a solemn assembly, gives a detail of ordinary events, or recapitulates, in his own style and manner, the sentiments of an illiterate peasant. So that in the epick poem, (and in all serious poetry, narrative or didactick, wherein the poet is the speaker,) language, in order to be natural, must be suited to the assumed or supposed character of the poet, as well as to the occasion and subject. Polyphemus, in a farce or comedy, might speak

clownishly; because he there appears in person, and rusticity is his character: but Homer and Virgil, rehearsing a speech of Polyphemus, would indeed deliver thoughts suitable to his character and condition, but would express them in their own elegant and harmonious language. And hence we see, how absurdly those critics argue, who blame Virgil for making *Eneas too poetical* (as they are pleased to phrase it) in the account he gives Dido of his adventures. They might with equal reason affirm, that every person in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as *Eneid*, speaks too poetically. The mistake arises from confounding epick with dramatick composition, and supposing that the heroes both of the one and of the other speak in their own persons. Whereas, in the first the poet is the only speaker, and in the last he never speaks at all: nay, the first is nothing more, from beginning to end, but a narration, or speech, delivered by a person assuming, and pretending to support, the character of an inspired poet. In the style, therefore, of the *epopee*, the poetick character must every where predominate, as well as the heroick; because a speech, in order to appear natural, must be suited to the supposed character of the speaker, as well as to the things and persons spoken of.

The puns that Milton ascribes to his devils, on a certain occasion,* are generally and justly condemned. It has, however, been urged, as an apology for them, that they are uttered by evil beings, who may be supposed to have lost, when they fell, all taste for elegance, as well as for virtue: and that the poet, on this one occasion, might have intended to make them both detestable as devils, and despicable as buffoons. But this plea cannot be admitted. For the fiends of Milton, notwithstanding their extreme wickedness, retain an elevation of mind, without which they could not have appeared in an epick poem, and which is inconsistent with the futility of a buffoon or witling. Granting, then, (what is not likely) that the poet, in this one instance, meant to render them contemptible for their low wit, he must yet be blamed for assigning them a part so repugnant to their general character. Or, even if he could be vindicated on this score, he is liable to censure for having put so paltry a part of his narration in the mouth of the holy angel Raphael. Or, if even for this we were to pardon him, still he is inexcusable, for having forgotten the assumed dignity of his own character so far, as to retail those wretched quibbles;

* Paradise Lost, book 6. vers. 609—627.

which, whether we suppose them to be uttered by an angel, a devil, or an epick poet, are grossly unnatural, because totally unsuitable to the condition and character of the speaker. A mind possessed with great ideas does not naturally attend to such as are trifling;* and, while actuated by admiration, and other important emotions, will not be apt to turn its view to those things that provoke contempt or laughter. Such we suppose the mind of every sublime writer to be; and such in fact it must be, as long at least as he employs himself in sublime composition.

- * Who that, from Alpine heights, his labouring eye
Shoots round the wide horizon, to survey
The Nile or Ganges rolling his bright wave
Through mountains, plains, through empires black
with shade,
And continents of sand, will turn his gaze
To mark the windings of a scanty rill,
That murmurs at his feet?

Pleasures of Imagination, book 1.

“The meditations,” says a very ingenious writer, (speaking of the view from Mount Etna), “are ever elevated in proportion to the grandeur and sublimity of the objects that surround us; and here, where you have all nature to rouse your imagination, what man can remain inactive?” See the whole passage; which, from its sublimity, one would be tempted to think had been composed on the spot. *Brydon's Travels, letter 10.*

Mean language, therefore, or ludicrous sentiments, are unnatural in an epick poem, for this reason, among others, that they do not naturally occur while one is composing it. And hence Milton's humorous description of the *limbo of vanity*,* however just as an allegory, however poignant as a satire, ought not to have obtained a place in *Paradise Lost*. Such a thing might suit the volatile genius of Ariosto and his followers: but is quite unworthy of the sober and well principled disciple of Homer and Virgil.

In dramatick poetry, the persons act and speak in their own character, and the author never appears at all. An elevated style, may, however, be natural in tragedy, on account of the high rank of the persons, and of the important affairs in which they are engaged. Even comedy, who takes her characters from the middle and lower ranks of mankind, may occasionally lift up her voice, as Horace says,† when she means to give utterance to any important emotion, or happens to introduce a personage of more than ordinary dignity. But what if persons of low condition should make their appearance in tragedy? And as the great must have attendants, how can this be guarded against? And if such persons ap-

* *Paradise Lost*, book 3. vers. 444.

† *Hor. Ar. Poet.* vers. 92.

pear, will not their language be unnatural, if raised to a level with that of their superiours? Or, would it not give a motley cast to the poem, if it were to fall below that level? No doubt, an uniform colour of language, though not essential to tragi-comedy, or to the historick drama, is indispensable in a regular tragedy. But persons of mean rank, if the tragick poet find it necessary to bring them in, may easily be supposed to have had advantages of education to qualify them for bearing a part in the dialogue, or for any other office in which he may think proper to employ them. Besides, language admits of many degrees of elevation; and a particular turn of fancy, or temperature of the passions, will sometimes give wonderful sublimity to the style even of a peasant or of a savage. So that the style of tragedy, notwithstanding its elevation, may be as various as the characters and passions of men, and may yet in each variety be natural. Moreover, the subject, and consequently the emotions, of tragedy, are always important; and important emotions prevailing in the mind of a peasant will exalt and invigorate his language. When the old shepherd in *Douglas* exclaims, "Blest be the day that made me a poor man; "my poverty has saved my master's house;" the thought and the words, though sufficiently tra-

gical, have no greater elevation, than we should expect from any person of his character and circumstances. Simplicity of style, for which none are disqualified by the meanness of their condition, often enforces a sublime or pathetick sentiment with the happiest effect. Let it be observed further, that poetical language is an imitation of real language improved to a state of perfection; and therefore, that the style of tragedy, though raised above that of common life, will never offend, so long as its elevations are at all consistent with probability. In fact, when the passions are well expressed, and the characters well drawn, a tragick poet needs not fear, that he shall be found fault with for the elegance of his language: though no doubt a great master will always know how to proportion the degree of elegance to the character of the speaker.

The dignity of a tragick hero may be so great as to require an elevation of language equal to the pitch of epick poetry itself. This might be exemplified from many of the speeches of Lear, Othello, Hamlet, and Cato, and of Samson in the Agonistes. But, in general, the epick style is to be distinguished from the tragick, by a more uniform elevation, and more elaborate harmony: because a poet, assuming the character of calm inspiration, and rather relating the feelings of

others, than expressing his own, would speak with more composure, steadiness, and art, than could reasonably be expected from those who deliver their thoughts according to the immediate impulse of passion.

The language of comedy is that of common life improved in point of correctness, but not much elevated; both because the speakers are of the middle and lower ranks of mankind, and also because the affairs they are engaged in give little scope to those emotions that exalt the mind, and rouse the imagination. As to the style of farce, which is frequently blended with comedy; it is purposely degraded below that of common life; or rather, it is the ridiculous language of common life made more ridiculous. I have already remarked, that farce is to poetry what caricatura is to painting; as in the last we look for no beauty of attitude or feature, so neither in the first do we expect elegance of diction. Absurdity of thought produces absurdity of words and behaviour: the true farcical character is more extravagantly and more uniformly absurd, than the droll of real life; and his language, in order to be natural, must be exaggerated accordingly. Yet as nothing is esteemed in the fine arts, but what displays the ingenuity of the artist, I should imagine, that, even in a

farce, one would not receive much pleasure from the mere incongruity of words or actions; because that may be so easily invented. Studied absurdity cannot be entertaining, unless it be in some degree uncommon.*

We may therefore repeat, and lay it down as a maxim, "That language is natural, when it is suited to the speaker's condition, character, and circumstances." And as, for the most part, the images and sentiments of serious poetry are copied from the images and sentiments, not of real, but of improved, nature;† so the language of serious poetry must (as hinted already) be a transcript, not of the real language of nature, which is often dissonant and rude, but of natural language improved as far as may be consistent with probability, and with the supposed character of the speaker. If this be not the case, if the language of poetry be such only as we hear in conversation, or read in history, it will, instead of delight, bring disappointment: because it will fall short of what we expect from an art which is recommended rather by its pleasurable qualities, than by its intrinsic utility; and to which, in order to render it pleasing, we grant

* Essay on Laughter, chap. 3.

† See above, part 1. chap. 3, 4, 5.

higher privileges, than to any other kind of literary composition, or any other mode of human language.

The next inquiry must therefore be, "How is the language of nature to be improved?" or rather, "What are those improvements that peculiarly belong to the language of poetry?"



SECTION II.

Natural Language is improved in Poetry by the use of Poetical Words.

ONE mode of improvement peculiar to poetical diction results from the use of those words, and phrases, which, because they rarely occur in prose, and frequently in verse, are by the grammarian and lexicographer termed *poetical*. In these some languages abound more than others: but no language I am acquainted with is altogether without them; and perhaps no language can be so, in which any number of good poems have been written. For poetry is better remembered than prose, especially by poetical authors; who will always be apt to imitate the phraseology of those they have been accustomed to read and admire: and thus, in the works of

poets, down through successive generations, certain phrases may have been conveyed, which, though originally perhaps in common use, are now confined to poetical composition. Prose writers are not so apt to imitate one another, at least in words and phrases; both because they do not so well remember one another's phraseology, and also because their language is less artificial, and must not, if they would make it easy and flowing, (without which it cannot be elegant), depart essentially from the style of correct conversation. Poets too, on account of the greater difficulty of their numbers, have, both in the choice and in the arrangement of words, a better claim to indulgence, and stand more in need of a discretionary power.

The language of Homer differs materially from what was written and spoken in Greece in the days of Socrates. It differs in the mode of inflection, it differs in the syntax, it differs even in the words; so that one might read Homer with ease, who could not read Xenophon; or Xenophon, without being able to read Homer. Yet I cannot believe that Homer, or the first Greek poet who wrote in his style, would make choice of a dialect quite different from what was intelligible in his own time; for poets have in all ages written with a view to be read, and to be read

with pleasure; which they could not be, if their diction were hard to be understood. It is more reasonable to suppose, that the language of Homer is according to some ancient dialect, which, though not perhaps in familiar use among the Greeks at the time he wrote, was however intelligible. From the Homerick to the Socratick age, a period had elapsed of no less than four hundred years; during which the style both of discourse and of writing must have undergone great alterations. Yet the Iliad continued the standard of heroick poetry, and was considered as the very perfection of poetical language; notwithstanding that some words in it were become so antiquated, or so ambiguous, that Aristotle himself seems to have been somewhat doubtful in regard to their meaning.* And if Chaucer's merit as a poet had been as great as Homer's, and the English tongue under Edward the third, as perfect as the Greek was in the second century after the Trojan war, the style of Chaucer would probably have been our model for poetical diction at this day; even as Petrarcha, his contemporary, is still imitated by the best poets of Italy.

I have somewhere read, that the rudeness of

* Aristot. Poet. cap. 25.

the style of Ennius was imputed by the old critics to his having copied too closely the dialect of common life. But this, I presume, must be a mistake. For, if we compare the fragments of that author with the comedies of Plautus, who flourished in the same age, and whose language was certainly copied from that of common life, we shall be struck with an air of antiquity in the former, that is not in the latter. Ennius, no doubt, like most other sublime poets, affected something of the antique in his expression: and many of his words and phrases, not adopted by any prose writer now extant, are to be found in Lucretius and Virgil, and were by them transmitted to succeeding poets. These form part of the Roman poetical dialect; which appears from the writings of Virgil, where we have it in perfection, to have been very copious. The style of this charming poet is indeed so different from prose, and is altogether so peculiar, that it is perhaps impossible to analyse it on the common principles of Latin grammar. And yet no author can be more perspicuous or more expressive; notwithstanding the frequency of Grecism in his syntax, and his love of old words, which he, in the judgment of Quintilian, knew better than any other man how to improve into decoration.*

* Quintil. Instit. viii. 3. § 3.

The poetical dialect of modern Italy is so different from the prosaick, that I have known persons who read the historians, and even spokè with tolerable fluency the language of that country, but could not easily construe a page of Petrarcha or Tasso. Yet it is not probable, that Petrarcha, whose works are a standard of the Italian poetical diction,* made any material innovations in his native tongue. I rather believe, that he wrote it nearly as it was spoken in his time, that is, in the fourteenth century; omitting only harsh combinations, and taking that liberty which Homer probably, and Virgil certainly, took before him, of reviving such old, but not obsolete expressions, as seemed peculiarly significant and melodious; and polishing his style to that degree of elegance which human speech, without becoming unnatural, may admit of, and which the genius of poetry, as an art subservient to pleasure, may be thought to require.

The French poetry in general is distinguished from prose rather by the rhyme and the measure, than by old or uncommon phraseology. Yet the French, on certain subjects, imitate the style of their old poets, of Marot in particular; and may therefore be said to have something of

* *Vicende della letteratura del Denim*, cap. 4.

a poetical dialect, though far less extensive than the Italian, or even than the English. And ~~many~~, I think, be presumed, that in future ages they will have more of this dialect than they have at present. This I would infer from the very uncommon merit of some of their late poets, particularly Boileau and La Fontaine, who, in their respective departments, will continue to be imitated, when the present modes of French prose are greatly changed: an event that, for all the pains they take to preserve their language, must inevitably happen, and whereof there are not wanting some presages already.

The English poetical dialect is not characterized by any peculiarities of inflection, nor by any great latitude in the use of foreign idioms: More copious it is, however, than one would at first imagine. I know of no author who has considered it in the way of detail.* What follows is but a very short specimen.

* Since writing the above, I have had the pleasure to read the following judicious remarks on this subject. "The language of the age is never the language of poetry, except among the French, whose verse, where the sentiment or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the contrary, has a language peculiar to itself; to which almost every one that has written has added something,

1. A few Greek and Latin idioms are common in English poetry, which are seldom or never to be met with in prose. QUENCHED OF HOPE. Shakspeare.—SHORN OF HIS BEAMS. Milton.—*Created thing* NOR VALUED HE NOR SHUNN'D. Milton.—*'Tis thus we riot, while* WHO SOW IT STARVE. Pope.—INTO WHAT PIT THOU SEE'ST FROM WHAT HEIGHT FALLEN. Milton.—*He de-*

“by enriching it with foreign idioms, and derivatives;
 “nay, sometimes words of their own composition or
 “invention. Shakspeare and Milton have been great
 “creators this way; and no one more licentious than
 “Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow expressions
 “from the former. Let me give you some instances from
 “Dryden, whom every body reckons a great master
 “of our poetical tongue. Full of *museful mopings*—unlike
 “the *trim* of love—a pleasant *beverage*—a *roundelay* of
 “love—stood silent in his *mood*—with knots and *knares*
 “deformed—his *ireful mood*—in proud *array*—his *boon*
 “was granted—and *disarray* and shameful rout—*way-*
 “ward but wise—*furbished* for the field—*dodder'd* oaks
 “—*disherited*—*smouldering* flames—*retchless* of laws—
 “*crones* old and ugly—the *beldam* at his side—the *gran-*
 “*dam hag*—*villanize* his father's fame. But they are infi-
 “nite: and our language not being a settled thing, (like
 “the French) has an undoubted right to words of an
 “hundred years old, provided antiquity have not ren-
 “dered them unintelligible.”

Mr. Gray's Letters, sect. 3. letter 4.

ceived the mother of mankind, WHAT TIME HIS PRIDE HAD CAST HIM out of heaven. Milton. Some of these, with others to be found in Milton, seem to have been adopted for the sake of brevity, which in the poetical tongue is indispensable. For the same reason perhaps, the articles *a* and *the* are sometimes omitted by our poets, though less frequently in serious than burlesque composition.* In English, the adjective generally goes before the substantive, the nominative before the verb, and the active verb before (what we call) the accusative. Exceptions, however, to this rule, are not uncommon even in prose. But in poetry they are more frequent. *Their homely joys, and DESTINY OBSCURE. Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight; and all*

* In the Greek poetry, the omission of the article is more frequent than the use of it. The very learned and ingenious author of a *Treatise On the Origin and Progress of Language*, supposes, that in the time of Homer, who established their poetical language, the article was little used by the Greeks: and this supposition appears highly probable, when we consider, that in the Latin, which was derived from the Pelasgick tongue, (a very ancient dialect of Greek), there is no article. Yet, though the article had been in use in Homer's age, I imagine that he, and every other Greek poet who wrote hexameters, would have often found it *necessary* to leave it out.

the air a solemn stillness holds. In general, that versification may be less difficult, and the cadence more uniformly pleasing; and sometimes, too, in order to give energy to expression, or vivacity to an image, the English poet is permitted to take much greater liberties, than the prose writer, in arranging his words, and modulating his lines and periods. Examples may be seen in every page of *Paradise Lost*.

2. Some of our poetical words take an additional syllable, that they may suit the verse the better; as, *dispart, distain, disport, affright, enchain*, for *part, stain, sport, fright, chain*. Others seem to be nothing else than common words made shorter, for the convenience of the versifier. Such are *auxiliar, sublunar, triumph, vale, part, clime, submiss, frolick, plain, drear, dread, helm, morn, eve, mead*, and *even, gan, illumine and illumine, ope, hoar, hide, swage, scape*; for *auxiliary, sublunary, trumpet, valley, depart, climate, submissive, frolicksome, complain, dreary, dreadful, helmet, morning, meadow, evening, began or began to, illuminate, open, hoary, abide, assuage, escape*. Of some of these the short form is the more ancient. In Scotland, *even, morn, bide, swage*, are still in vulgar use; but *morn*, except when contradistinguished to *even*, is synonymous, not with *morning*, (as in the English poetical dialect,) but with *morrow*. The Latin poets, in a way

somewhat similar, and perhaps for a similar reason, shortened *fundamentum*, *tutamentum*, *munimentum*, &c. into *fundamen*, *tutamen*, *munimen*.*

3. Of the following words which are now almost peculiar to poetry, the greater part are ancient, and were once no doubt in common use in England, as many of them still are in Scotland. *Afield*, *amain*, *annoy* (a noun), *anon*, *aye* (ever), *behest*, *blithe*, *brand* (sword), *bridle*, *carol*, *dame* (lady), *featly*, *fell* (an adjective), *gaude*, *gore*, *host* (army), *lambkin*, *late* (of late), *lay* (poem), *lea*, *glade*, *gleam*, *hurl*, *lore*, *meed*, *orisons*, *plod* (to travel laboriously), *ringlet*, *rue* (a verb), *ruth*, *ruthless*, *sojourn* (a noun), *smite*, *speed* (an active verb), *save* (except), *spray* (twig), *steed*, *strain* (song), *strand*, *swain*, *thrall*, *thrill*, *trail* (a verb), *troll*, *wail*, *welter*, *warble*, *wayward*, *woo*, *the while* (in the mean time), *you*, *of yore*.

4. These that follow are also poetical; but, so far as I know, were never in common use. *Aphal*, *arrowy*, *attune*, *battailous*, *breezy*, *car* (chariot), *clarion*, *cates*, *courser*, *darkling*, *flicker*, *floweret*,

* Quod poetæ alligati ad certam pedum necessitatem, non semper propriis uti possint, sed depulsi a recta viâ necessario ad eloquendi quædam diverticula confugiant; nec mutare quædam modo verba, sed *extendere*, *corripere*, *convertere*, *dividere*, *cojantur*. *Quintilian*

emblaze, gairish, circlet, impearl, nightly, noiseless, finlon (wing), shadowy, slumberous, streamy, troublous, wilder (a verb), shrill (a verb), shook (shaken), madding, viewless. I suspect too, that the following, derived from the Greek and Latin, are peculiar to poetry. *Clang, clangour, choral, bland, boreal, dire, ensanguined, ire, ireful, lave (to wash), nymph (lady, girl), orient, panoply, philomel, infuriate, jocund, radiant, raft, redolent, refulgent, verdant, vernal, zephyr, zone (girdle), sylvan, suffuse.*

5. In most languages, the rapidity of pronunciation abbreviates some of the commonest words, or even joins two, or perhaps more, of them, into one; and some of these abbreviated forms find admission into writing. The English language was quite disfigured by them in the end of the last century; but Swift, by his satire and example, brought them into disrepute: and, though some of them be retained in conversation, as *don't, shan't, can't*, they are now avoided in solemn style; and by elegant writers in general, except where the colloquial dialect is imitated, as in comedy. *'Tis* and *'twas*, since the time of Shaftesbury, seem to have been daily losing credit, at least in prose; but still have a place in poetry; perhaps because they contribute to conciseness. *'Twas on a lofty vase's side.* Gray. *'Tis*

true, 'tis certain, man though dead retains part of himself. Pope.—In verse too, *ever* may be shortened into *o'er*, (which is the Scotch, and probably was the old English, pronunciation) *never* into *ne'er*; and from *the* and *to*, when they go before a word beginning with a vowel, the final letter is sometimes cut off. *O'er hills, o'er dales, o'er crags, o'er rocks they go.* Pope.—*Where'er she turns, the graces homage pay. And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave. Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unrol.* Gray.—*T' alarm th' eternal midnight of the grave.* These abbreviations are now peculiar to the poetical tongue; but not necessary to it. They sometimes promote brevity, and render versification less difficult.

6. Those words which are commonly called *compound epithets*, as *rosy-finger'd, rosy-bosom'd, many-twinkling, many-sounding, moss-grown, bright-eyed, straw-built, spirit-stirring, incense-breathing, heaven-taught, love-whispering, lute-resounding*, are also to be considered as part of our poetical dialect. It is true we have compounded adjectives in familiar use, as *high-seasoned, well-natured, ill-bred*, and innumerable others. But I speak of those that are less common, that seldom occur except in poetry, and of which in prose the use would appear affected. And that they sometimes promote brevity and

vivacity of expression, cannot be denied. But, as they give, when too frequent, a stiff and finical air to a performance; as they are not always explicit in the sense, nor agreeable in the sound; as they are apt to produce a confusion, or too great a multiplicity of images; as they tend to disfigure the language, and furnish a pretext for endless innovation; I would have them used sparingly; and those only used, which the practice of popular authors has rendered familiar to the ear, and which are in themselves peculiarly emphatical and harmonious. For I cannot think, with Dacier and Sanadon, that this well known verse in Horace's Art of Poetry,

Dixeris egregie, notum si callida verbum
Reddiderit junctura novum —

gives any warrant, even to a Latin poet, for the formation of these compound words; which, if I mistake not, were more fashionable in the days of Ennius, than of Horace or Virgil.*

* The criticks are divided about the meaning of this passage. Horace is speaking of *new words*; which he allows to be sometimes necessary: but which, he says, ought to be *sparingly* and *cautiously* introduced; In verbis etiam tenuis cautusque serendis; and then subjoins the words quoted in the text, Dixeris egregie, &c.

1. Some think, that this *callida junctura* refers to the

7. In the transformation of nouns into verbs and participles, our poetical dialect admits of greater latitude than prose. Hymn, pillow, curtain, story, pillar, picture, peal, surge, cavern,

formation of *compound epithets*, as *velivolus*, *saxifragus*, *solivagus*, &c. and that the import of the precept is this:

“Rather than by bringing in a word altogether new, even

“when a new word is necessary, you should express

“yourself by two known words artfully joined together

“into one, so as to assume a new appearance, and to ad-

“mit a new though analogical signification.” This might

no doubt be done with propriety in some cases. But I

cannot think, that Horace is here speaking of compound

words. For, first, this sort of words were much more

suitable to the genius of the Greek than of the Latin

tongue; as Quintilian somewhere insinuates, and every

body knows who is at all acquainted with these lan-

guages. Secondly, we find in fact, that these words are

less frequent in Horace and Virgil, than in the older

poets; whence we may infer, that they became less fash-

ionable as the Latin tongue advanced nearer to perfec-

tion. Thirdly, Virgil is known to have introduced three

or four new words from the Greek, *Lychni*, *Spelea*,

Thyas, &c. but it does not appear, that either Virgil or

Horace ever fabricated one of these compound words;

and it is not probable, that Horace would recommend

a practice, which neither himself nor Virgil had ever

warranted by example. Fourthly, our author, in his

illustrations upon the precept in question, affirms, that

new words will more easily obtain currency, if taken

from the Greek tongue; and Virgil, if we may judge of

honey, career, cincture, bosom, sphere, are common nouns; but, *to hymn, to pillow, curtained, pil-lared, pictured, peeling, surging, cavern'd, honied, careering, cinctured, bosomed, sphered*, would ap-

his opinions by his practice, appears to have been of the same mind. And there was good reason for it. The Greek and Latin are kindred languages; and as the former was much studied at Rome, there was no risk of introducing any obscurity into the Roman language by the introduction of a Greek word. Lastly, it may be doubted, whether *junctura*, though it often denotes the composition of words in a sentence or clause (Quintil. ix. 4.), and sometimes arrangement or composition in general (Hor. *Art. Poet.* verse 242.) is ever used to express the union of syllables in a word, or of simple words in a compound epithet.

2. Other interpreters suppose, that this *callida junctura* refers to the arrangement of words in the sentence, and that the precept amounts to this: "When a new expression is necessary, you will acquit yourself well, if by means of an artful arrangement you can to a known word give a new signification." But one would think, that the observance of this precept must tend to the utter confusion of language. To give new significations to words in present use, must increase the ambiguity of language, which in every tongue is greater than it ought to be, and which would seem to be more detrimental to eloquence and even to literature, than the introduction of many new words of definite meaning. Those who favour this interpretation give *comæ sylvarum* for *folia*, as a phrase to exemplify the precept. But

pear affected in prose, though in verse they are warranted by the very best authority.

Some late poets, particularly the imitators of Spenser, have introduced a great variety of un-

the foilage of a tree is not a new idea, nor could there be any need of a new word or new phrase to express it: though a poet, no doubt, on account of his verse, or on some other account, might choose to express it by a *figure*, rather than by its *proper* name. *Comæ sylvarum* for *folia*, is neither less nor more than a metaphor, or, if you please, a catachresis; but Horace is speaking, not of figurative language, but of new words. Both these interpretations suppose, that the words of our poet are to be construed according to this order: *Dixeris egregie, si callida junctura reddiderit notum verbum novum.*

3. The best of all our poet's interpreters, the learned Dr. Hurd, construes the passage in the same manner, and explains it thus: "Instead of framing new words, I recommend to you any kind of artful management, by which you may be able to give a new air and cast to old ones." And this explication he illustrates most ingeniously by a variety of examples, that throw great light on the subject of poetical diction. See his notes on the *Ars Poetica*.

I should ill consult my credit, if I were to oppose my judgment to that of this able critick and excellent author. Yet I would beg leave to say, that to me the poet seems, through this whole passage, from vers. 46. to vers. 72. to be speaking of the *formation of new words*; a practice whereof he allows the danger, but proves the necessity. And I find I cannot divest myself of an old prejudice

common words, as *certes*, *eftsoons*, *ne*, *whilom*, *transmew*, *moil*, *fone*, *lofel*, *albe*, *hight*, *dight*, *pight*, *thews*, *couthful*, *assot*, *muchel*, *wend*, *ar-rear*, &c. These were once poetical words, no doubt; but they are now obsolete, and to many readers unintelligible. No man of the present age, however conversant in this dialect, would naturally express himself in it on any interesting emergence; or, supposing this natural to the antiquarian, it would never appear so to the common hearer or reader. A mixture of these words, therefore, must ruin the pathos of mod-

in favour of another interpretation, which is more obvious and simple, and which I considered as the best, long before I knew it was authorized by that judicious annotator Joannes Bond, and by Dryden in his notes upon the *Eneid*, as well as by the Abbe Batteux in his commentary on Horace's *Art of Poetry*. "New words" (says the poet) are to be cautiously and sparingly introduced; but, when necessary, an author will do well to give them such a position in the sentence, as that the reader shall be at no loss to discover their meaning." For I would construe the passage thus, *Dixeris egregie, si callida junctura reddiderit novum verbum notum*. But why, it may be said, did not Horace, if this was really his meaning, put *novum* in the first line, and *notum* in the second? The answer is easy. His verse would not admit that order: for the first syllable of *novum* is short, and the first syllable of *notum* long.

ern language; and as they are not familiar to our ear, and plainly appear to be sought after and affected, will generally give a stiffness to modern versification. Yet in subjects approaching to the ludicrous they may have a good effect; as in the *Schoolmistress* of Shenstone, Parnel's Fairy Tale, Thomson's Castle of Indolence, and Pope's lines in the Dunciad upon Wormius. But this effect will be most pleasing to those who have least occasion to recur to the glossary.

But why, it may be asked, should these old words be more pathetick and pleasing in Spenser, than in his imitators? I answer, because in him they seem, or we believe them to be, natural; in them we are sure they are affected. In him there is an ease and uniformity of expression, that shows he wrote a language not materially different from what was written by all the serious poets of his time; whereas the mixed dialect of these imitators is plainly artificial, and such as would make any man ridiculous, if he were now to adopt it in conversation. A long beard may give dignity to the portrait or statue of a hero, whom we know to have been two hundred years in his grave; but the chin of a modern European commander bristling with that antique appendage, would appear awkward and ridiculous. But did not Spenser himself make use of

words that are known to have been obsolete, or merely provincial, in his time? Yes; and these words in Spenser have the same bad effect, that words now obsolete have in his imitators; they are to most readers unintelligible, and to those who understand them appear ludicrous or affected: some of his eclogues, and even some passages in the *Fairy Queen*, are liable to this censure. But what if Spenser had fixed the poetical language of England, as Homer did that of Greece? Would any of his old words in that case have appeared awkward in a modern poem? Perhaps they would not: but let it be observed, that, in that case, they would have been adopted by Milton, and Dryden, and Pope, and by all our serious poets since the age of Elizabeth; and would therefore have been perfectly intelligible to every reader of English verse; and, from our having been so long accustomed to meet with them in the most elegant compositions, would have acquired a dignity equal, or perhaps superior, to that which now belongs to the poetical language of Pope and Milton.

I grant, it is not always easy to fix the boundary between poetical and obsolete expressions. To many readers, *lore*, *meed*, *behest*, *blithe*, *gaude*, *spray*, *thrall*, may already appear antiquated; and to some the style of Spenser, or even of Chau-

cer, may be as intelligible as that of Dryden. This however we may venture to affirm, that a word, which the majority of readers cannot understand without a glossary, may with reason be considered as obsolete; and ought not to be used in modern composition, unless revived, and recommended to the publick ear, by some very eminent writer. There are but few words in Milton, as *nathless*, *tine*, *frorc*, *bosky*, &c.; there are but one or two in Dryden, as *falsify* :* and in Pope, there are none at all, which every reader of our poetry may not be supposed to understand: whereas in Shakspeare there are many, and in Spenser many more, for which one who knows English very well may be obliged to consult the dictionary. The practice of Milton, Dryden, or Pope, may therefore, in almost all cases, be admitted as good authority for the use of a poetical word. And in them, all the words above enumerated, as poetical, and in present use, may actually be found. And of such poets as may choose to observe this rule, it will not be said, either that they reject the judgment of Quin-

* Dryden in one place (*Eneid* ix. vers. 1095) uses *falsified* to denote *pierced through and through*. He acknowledges, that this use of the word is an innovation; and has nothing to plead for it but his own authority, and that *falsare* in Italian sometimes means the same thing.

tilian, who recommends the newest of the old words, and the oldest of the new, or that they are unattentive to Pope's precept,

Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.*

We must not suppose, that these poetical words never occur at all, except in poetry. Even from conversation they are not excluded; and the ancient criticks allow, that they may be admitted into prose; where they occasionally confer dignity upon a sublime subject, or, for reasons elsewhere hinted at,† heighten the ludicrous qualities of a mean one. But it is in poetry only, where the frequent use of them does not savour of affectation.

Nor must we suppose them essential to this art. Many passages there are of exquisite poetry, wherein not a single phrase occurs, that might not be used in prose. In fact the influence of these words in adorning English verse is not very extensive. Some influence however they have. They serve to render the poetical style, first, more melodious; and, secondly, more solemn.

First, They render the poetical style more

* Essay on Criticism, vers. 335.

† Essay on Laughter, chap. 2. sect. 4.

melodious, and more easily reducible into measure. Words of unwieldy size, or difficult pronunciation, are never used by correct poets, where they can be avoided; unless in their sound they have something imitative of the sense. Homer's poetical inflections contribute wonderfully to the sweetness of his numbers: and if the reader is pleased to look back to the specimen I gave of the English poetical dialect, he will find that the words are in general well sounding, and such as may coalesce with other words, without producing harsh combinations. Quintilian observes, that poets, for the sake of their verse, are indulged in many liberties, not granted to the orator, of lengthening, shortening, and dividing their words:* and if the Greek and Roman poets claimed this indulgence from necessity, and obtained it, the English, those of them especially who write in rhyme, may claim it with better reason; as the words of their language are less musical, and far less susceptible of variety in arrangement and syntax.

Secondly, Such poetical words as are known to be ancient have something venerable in their appearance, and impart a solemnity to all around them. This remark is from Quintilian; who

* Instit. Orat. lib. 10. cap. 1. § 4.

adds, that they give to a composition that cast and colour of antiquity, which in painting is so highly valued, but which art can never effectually imitate.* Poetical words that are either not ancient, or not known to be such, have however, a pleasing effect from association. We are accustomed to meet with them in sublime and elegant writing; and hence they come to acquire sublimity and elegance: even as the words we hear on familiar occasions come to be accounted familiar; and as those that take their rise among pickpockets, gamblers, and gypsies, are thought too indelicate to be used by any person of taste or good manners. When one hears the following lines, which abound in poetical words,

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the strawbuilt shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed:

one is as sensible of the dignity of the language, as one would be of the vileness or vulgarity of that man's speech, who should prove his acquaintance with Bridewell, by interlarding his discourse with such terms as *milldoll*, *queer cull*, or *nubbing cheat*;† or who, in imitation of

* Lib. 8. cap. 3. § 3.

† See the Scoundrel's Dictionary.

fops and gamblers, should, on the common occasions of life, talk of being *beat hollow* or *saving his distance*.* What gives dignity to persons gives dignity to language. A man of this character is one who has borne important employments, been connected with honourable associates, and never degraded himself by levity, or immorality of conduct. Dignified phrases are those which have been used to express elevated sentiments, have always made their appearance in elegant composition, and have never been profaned by giving permanency or utterance to the passions of the vile, the giddy, or the worthless. And as by an active old age, the dignity of such men is confirmed and heightened; so the dignity of such words, if they be not suffered to fall into disuse, seldom fails to improve by length of time.

* Language of Newmarket.

SECTION III.

Natural Language is improved in Poetry, by means of Tropes and Figures.

So much for the nature and use of those words that are *poetical*, and yet not figurative. But from *figurative expression* there arises a more copious and important source of poetick eloquence. Some sorts of poetry are distinguished by the beauty, boldness, and frequency of the figures, as well as by the measure, or by any of the contrivances above mentioned. And in prose we often meet with such figures and words, as we expect only in poetry: in which case the language is called *poetical*: and in verse we sometimes find a diction so tame, and so void of ornament, that we brand it with the appellation of *prosaick*.

As my design in this discourse is, not to deliver a system of rhetorick, but to explain the peculiar effects of poetry upon the mind, by tracing out the characters that distinguish this from other literary arts; it would be improper to enter here, with any degree of minuteness, into the philosophy of tropes and figures: these being ornamental, not to poetry only, but to human speech in general. All that the present oc-

casion requires will be performed, when it is shown, in what respects tropical and figurative language is more necessary to poetry than to any other sort of composition.

If it appear, that, by means of figures, language may be made more *pleasing*, and more *natural*, than it would be without them; it will follow that to poetick language, whose end is to *please* by imitating *nature*, figures must be not only ornamental, but necessary. I shall therefore, first, make a few remarks on the importance and utility of figurative language; secondly, show, that figures are more necessary to poetry in general, than to any other mode of writing; and, thirdly, assign a reason why they are more necessary in some kinds of poetry than in others.

I. I purpose to make a few remarks on the importance and utility of figurative expression, in making language more pleasing and more natural.

1. The first remark is, that tropes and figures are often necessary to supply the unavoidable defects of language. When *proper* words are wanting, or not recollected, or when we do not choose to be always repeating them, we must have recourse to tropes and figures. When philosophers began to explain the operations of

the mind, they found, that most of the words in common use, being framed to answer the more obvious exigencies of life, were in their proper signification applicable to matter only and its qualities. What was to be done in this case? Would they think of making a new language to express the qualities of mind? No: that would have been difficult, or impracticable; and granting it both practicable and easy, they must have foreseen, that nobody would read or listen to what was thus spoken or written in a new, and consequently, in an unknown tongue. They therefore took the language as they found it; and, wherever, they thought there was a similarity or analogy between the qualities of mind and the qualities of matter, scrupled not to use the names of the material qualities tropically, by applying them to the mental qualities. Hence came the phrases, *solidity* of judgment, *warmth* of imagination, *enlargement* of understanding, and many others: which, though figurative, express the meaning just as well as *proper* words would have done. In fact, numerous as the words in every language are, they must always fall short of the unbounded variety of human thoughts and perceptions. Tastes and smells are almost as numerous as the species of bodies. Sounds admit of perceptible varieties

that surpass all computation, and the secondary colours may be diversified without end. If each variety of external perception were to have a name, language would be insurmountably difficult; nay, if men were to appropriate a class of names to each particular sense, they would multiply words exceedingly, without adding any thing to the clearness of speech. Those words, therefore, that in their proper significations denote the objects of one sense, they often apply tropically to the objects of another; and say, sweet taste, sweet smell, sweet sound; sharp point, sharp taste, sharp sound; harmony of sounds, harmony of colours, harmony of parts; soft silk, soft colour, soft sound, soft temper; and so in a thousand instances; and yet these words, in their tropical signification, are not less intelligible than in their proper one; for sharp taste and sharp sound, are as expressive as sharp sword; and harmony of tones is not better understood by the musician, than harmony of parts by the architect, and harmony of colours by the painter.

Savages, illiterate persons, and children, have comparatively but few words in proportion to the things they may have occasion to speak of; and must therefore recur to tropes and figures more frequently, than persons of copious elo-

cution. A seaman, or mechanick, even when he talks of that which does not belong to his art, borrows his language from that which does; and this makes his diction figurative to a degree that is sometimes entertaining enough. "Death, (says a seaman in one of Smollet's novels) has not yet *boarded* my comrade; but they have been *yard arm and yard arm* these *three glasses*. His *starboard* eye is open, but fast *jamm'd* in his head; and the *haulyards* of his under jaw have given way." These phrases are exaggerated; but we allow them to be natural, because we know that illiterate people are apt to make use of tropes and figures taken from their own trade, even when they speak of things that are very remote and incongruous. In those poems, therefore, that imitate the conversation of illiterate persons, as in comedy, farce, and pastoral, such figures judiciously applied may render the imitation more pleasing, because more exact and natural.

Words that are untuneable and harsh the poet is often obliged to avoid, when perhaps he has no other way to express their meaning than by tropes and figures; and sometimes the measure of his verse may oblige him to reject a proper word that is not harsh, merely on account of its being too long, or too short, or in any other way

unsuitable to the rhythm, or to the rhyme. And hence another use of figurative language, that it contributes to poetical harmony. Thus, *to press the plain* is frequently used to signify *to be slain in battle*; *liquid plain* is put for *ocean*, *blue serene* for *sky*, and *sylvan reign* for *country life*.

2. Tropes and figures are favourable to delicacy. When the proper name of a thing is in any respect unpleasant, a well chosen trope will convey the idea in such a way as to give no offence. This is agreeable, and even necessary, in polite conversation, and cannot be dispensed with in elegant writing of any kind. Many words, from their being often applied to vulgar use, acquire a meanness that disqualifies them for a place in serious poetry; while perhaps, under the influence of a different system of manners, the corresponding words in another language may be elegant, or at least not vulgar. When one reads Homer in the Greek, one takes no offence at his calling Eumeus by a name which, literally rendered, signifies *swinherd*; first, because the Greek word is well sounding in itself; secondly, because we have never heard it pronounced in conversation, nor consequently debased by vulgar use; and, thirdly, because we know, that the office denoted by it was, in the age of Eumeus, both important and honour-

able. But Pope would have been blamed, if a name so indelicate as *swineherd* had in his translation been applied to so eminent a personage; and therefore he judiciously makes use of the trope *synecdoche*, and calls him *swain*;^{*} a word both elegant and poetical, and not likely to lead the reader into any mistake about the person spoken of, as his employment had been described in a preceding passage. The same Eumeus is said, in the simple, but melodious language of the original, to have been making his own shoes when Ulysses came to his door; a work which in those days the greatest heroes would often find necessary. This too the translator softens by a tropical expression:

Here sat Eumeus, and his cares applied
To form strong *buskins* of well season'd hide.

A hundred other examples might be quoted from this translation; but these will explain my meaning.

There are other occasions, on which the delicacy of figurative language is still more needful: as in Virgil's account of the effects of animal love, and of the plague among the beasts, in the third Georgick; where Dryden's style, by

^{*} Pope's Homer's *Odyssey*, book 14. vers. 41.

being less figurative than the original, is in one place exceedingly filthy, and in another obscene.

Hobbes could construe a Greek author: but his skill in words must have been all derived from the dictionary: for he seems not to have known, that any one articulate sound could be more agreeable, or any one phrase more dignified, than any other. In his Iliad and Odyssey, even when he hits the author's sense, (which is not always the case), he proves, by his choice of words, that of harmony, elegance, or energy of style, he had no manner of conception. And hence that work, though called a translation of Homer, does not even deserve the name of *poem*; because it is in every respect *unpleasing*, being nothing more than a fictitious narrative delivered in mean prose, with the additional meanness of harsh rhyme, and untuneable measure. Trapp understood Virgil well enough as a grammarian, and had a taste for his beauties; yet his translation bears no resemblance to Virgil; which is owing to the same cause, an imprudent choice of words and figures, and a total want of harmony.

I grant, that the delicacy we here contend for may, both in conversation and in writing, be carried too far. To call *killing an innocent*

man in a duel an affair of honour, and *a violation of the rights of wedlock* an affair of gallantry, is a prostitution of figurative language. Nor do I think it any credit to us, that we are said to have upwards of forty figurative phrases to denote excessive drinking. Language of this sort generally implies, that the publick abhorrence of such crimes is not so strong as it ought to be: and I am not certain, whether even our morals might not be improved, if we were to call these and such like crimes by their proper names, murder, adultery, drunkenness, gluttony; names, that not only express our meaning, but also betoken our disapprobation. As to writing, it cannot be denied, that even Pope himself, in the excellent version just now quoted, has sometimes, for the sake of his numbers, or for fear of giving offence by too close an imitation of Homer's simplicity, employed tropes and figures too quaint or too solemn for the occasion. And the finical style is in part characterised by the writer's dislike to literal expressions, and affectedly substituting in their stead unnecessary tropes and figures. With these authors, a man's only child must always be his *only hope*, a country maid becomes a *rural beauty*, or perhaps a *nymph of the groves*; if flattery sing at all, it must be a *syren song*; the shepherd's flute

dwindles into an *oaten reed*, and his crook is exalted into a *sceptre*: the *silver lillies* rise from their *golden beds*, and *languish* to the *complaining gale*. A young woman, though a good christian, cannot make herself agreeable without *sacrificing to the graces*; nor hope to do any execution among the *gentle swains*, till a whole legion of *cupids*, armed with *flames* and *darts*, and other weapons, begin to discharge from her eyes their formidable artillery. For the sake of variety, or of the verse, some of these figures may now and then find a place in a poem; but in prose, unless very sparingly used, they savour of affectation.

3. Tropes and figures promote brevity; and brevity, united with perspicuity, is always agreeable. An example or two will be given in the next paragraph. Sentiments thus delivered, and imagery thus painted, are readily apprehended by the mind, make a strong impression upon the fancy, and remain long in the memory: whereas too many words, even when the meaning is good, never fail to bring disgust and weariness. They argue a debility of mind which hinders the author from seeing his thoughts in one distinct point of view; and they also encourage a suspicion, that there is something faulty or defective in the matter. In the

poetick style, therefore, which is addressed to the fancy and passions, and intended to make a vivid, a pleasing, and a permanent impression, brevity, and consequently tropes and figures, are indispensable. And a language will always be the better suited to poetical purposes, the more it admits of this brevity; a character which is more conspicuous in the Greek and Latin than in any modern tongue, and much less in the French than in the Italian or English.

4. Tropes and figures contribute to strength or energy of language, not only by their conciseness, but also by conveying to the fancy ideas that are easily comprehended, and make a strong impression. We are powerfully affected with what we see, or feel, or hear. When a sentiment comes enforced or illustrated by figures taken from objects of sight, or touch, or hearing, one thinks, as it were, that one sees, or feels, or hears, the thing spoken of; and thus, what in itself would be perhaps obscure, or is merely intellectual, may be made to seize our attention and interest our passions almost as effectually as if it were an object of outward sense. When Virgil calls the Scipios *thunderbolts of war*, he very strongly expresses in one word, and by one image, the rapidity of their victories, the noise their achievements

made in the world, and the ruin and consternation that attended their irresistible career. When Homer calls Ajax *the bulwark of the Greeks*, he paints with equal brevity his vast size and strength, the difficulty of prevailing against him, and the confidence wherewith his countrymen reposed on his valour. When Solomon says of the strange woman, or harlot, that "her feet go *down* to death," he lets us know, not only that her path ends in destruction, but also, that they who accompany her will find it easy to go forward to ruin, and difficult to return to their duty. Satan's enormous magnitude, and refulgent appearance, his perpendicular ascent through a region of darkness, and the inconceivable rapidity of his motion, are all painted out to our fancy by Milton, in one very short similitude,

Sprung upward, like—a pyramid of fire:*

To take in the full meaning of which figure, we must imagine ourselves in chaos, and a vast luminous body rising upward near the place where we are, so swiftly as to appear a continued tract of light; and lessening to the view according to the increase of distance, till it end

* Parad. Lost, book 2. verse 1013.

in a point, and then disappear; and all this must be supposed to strike our eye at one instant. Equal to this in propriety, though not in magnificence, is that allegory of Gray,

The paths of glory lead but to the grave:

which presents to the imagination a wide plain, where several roads appear, crowded with glittering multitudes, and issuing from different quarters, but drawing nearer and nearer as they advance, till they terminate in the dark and narrow house, where all their glories enter in succession, and disappear for ever. When it is said in scripture, of a good man who died, that he *fell asleep*, what a number of ideas are at once conveyed to our imagination, by this beautiful and expressive figure! As a labourer, at the close of day, goes to sleep, with the satisfaction of having performed his work, and with the agreeable hope of awaking in the morning of a new day, refreshed and cheerful; so a good man, at the end of life, resigns himself calm and contented to the will of his Maker, with the sweet reflection of having endeavoured to do his duty, and with the transporting hope of soon awaking in the regions of light, to life and happiness eternal. The figure also suggests, that

to a good man the transition from life and death is even in the sensation no more painful, than when our faculties melt away into the pleasing insensibility of sleep. Satan flying among the stars is said by Milton to "*sail* between worlds "and worlds;" which has an elegance and force far superiour to the proper word *fly*. For by this allusion to a ship, we are made to form a lively idea of his great size, and to conceive of his motion, that it was equable and majestick. Virgil uses a happy figure to express the size of the great wooden horse, by means of which the Greeks were conveyed into Troy: "*Equum divina Palladis arte ædificant.*" Milton is still bolder when he says,

Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
Himself to sing, and *build the lofty rhyme.**

The phrase, however, though bold, is emphatical, and gives a noble idea of the durability

* In the Latin phrase *condere carmen*, which Milton no doubt had in his view, the verb is of more general signification, than the English verb *to build*; and therefore the figure is bolder in English than Latin. It may even be doubted, whether *condere carmen* be at all figurative; for *Condere* is resolved by R. Stephanus into *simul dare*. *Condere carmen*, *condere poema*, *condere historiam*, occur in Cicero and Pliny; but Milton's phrase is much too daring for English prose.

of poetry, as well as of the art and attention requisite to form a good poem. There are hundreds of tropical expressions in common use, incomparably more energetick than any proper words of equal brevity that could be put in their place. A cheek *burning* with blushes, is a trope which at once describes the colour as it appears to the beholder, and the glowing heat as it is felt by the person blushing. *Chilled* with despondence, *petrified* with astonishment, *thunderstruck* with disagreeable and unexpected intelligence, *melted* with love or pity, *dissolved* in luxury, *hardened* in wickedness, *softening* into remorse, *inflamed* with desire, *tossed* with uncertainty, &c.; every one is sensible of the force of these and the like phrases, and that they must contribute to the energy of composition.

5. Tropes and figures promote strength of expression, and are in poetry peculiarly requisite, because they are often more *natural*, and more *imitative*, than proper words. In fact, this is so much the case, that it would be impossible to imitate the language of passion without them. It is true, that when the mind is agitated, one does not run out into allegories, or long-winded similitudes, or any of the figures that require much attention and many words, or

that tend to withdraw the fancy from the object of the passion. Yet the language of many passions must be figurative, notwithstanding; because they rouse the fancy, and direct it to objects congenial to their own nature, which diversify the language of the speaker with a multitude of allusions. The fancy of a very angry man, for example, presents to his view a train of disagreeable ideas connected with the passion of anger, and tending to encourage it; and if he speak without restraint during the paroxysm of his rage, those ideas will force themselves upon him, and compel him to give them utterance. "Infernal monster! (he will say) my blood boils at him: he has used me like a dog; never was man so injured as I have been by this barbarian. He has no more sense of propriety than a stone. His countenance is diabolical, and his soul as ugly as his countenance. His heart is as cold and hard, and his resolutions dark and bloody," &c. This speech is wholly figurative. It is made up of *metaphors* and *hyperboles*, which, with the *prosopopeia* and *apostrophe*, are the most passionate of all the figures. Lear, driven out of doors by his unnatural daughters, in the midst of darkness, thunder, and tempest, naturally breaks forth (for his indignation is just now

raised to the highest pitch) into the following violent exclamation against the crimes of mankind, in which almost every word is figurative.

Tremble thou wretch,
That hast within thee undivulged crimes
Unwhipt of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
Thou perjured, and thou simular of virtue,
Thou art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert, and convenient seeming,
Hast practised on man's life. Close pent up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and cry
These dreadful summoners grace.

The vehemence of maternal love, and sorrow from the apprehension of losing her child, make the lady Constance utter a language that is strongly figurative, though quite suitable to the condition and character of the speaker. The passage is too long for a quotation, but concludes thus:

O Lord! my Arthur, my fair son,
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world,
My widow comfort, and my sorrow's cure.*

Similar to this, and equally expressive of conjugal love, is that beautiful hyperbole in Homer; where Andromache, to dissuade her

* King John.

husband from going out to the battle, tell that she had now no mother, father, or brethren, all her kindred being dead, and her native country desolate; and then tenderly adds,

But while my Hector yet survives, I see
My father, mother, brethren, all in thee.*

As the passions that agitate the soul, and rouse the fancy, are apt to vent themselves in tropes and figures, so those that depress the mind adopt for the most part a plain diction without any ornament. For to a dejected mind, wherein the imagination is generally inactive, it is not probable, that any great variety of ideas will present themselves; and when these are few and familiar, the words that express them must be simple. As no author equals Shakespeare in boldness or variety of figures, when he copies the style of those violent passions that stimulate the fancy; so, when he would exhibit the human mind in a dejected state, no uninspired writer excels him in simplicity. The same Lear whose resentment had impaired his understanding, while it broke out in the most boisterous language, when, after some medical applications, he recovers his reason, his

* Iliad, book 6.

rage being now exhausted, his pride humbled, and his spirits totally depressed, speaks in a style than which nothing can be imagined more simple or more affecting:

Pray, do not mock me;

I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, and, to deal plainly with you,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man,
Yet I am doubtful; for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is, and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. ———*

Desdemona, ever gentle, artless, and sincere, shocked at the unkindness of her husband, and overcome with melancholy, speaks in a style so beautifully simple, and so perfectly natural, that one knows not what to say in commendation of it:

My mother had a maid call'd Barbara;
She was in love, and he she loved proved mad,
And did forsake her. She had a song of willow;
An old thing it was, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it. That song to-night
Will not go from my mind; I have much to do,

* King Lear, act 4. scene 7.

But to go hang my head all at one side,
And sing it like poor Barbara.*

Sometimes the imagination, even when exerted to the utmost, takes in but few ideas.

* Othello, act 4. scene 3. This charming passage translated into the *finical style*, which, whatever be the subject or speaker, must always be descriptive, enigmatical, and full of figures, would perhaps run thus:

Even now, sad Memory to my thought recalls
The nymph Dione, who, with pious care,
My much loved mother, in my vernal years,
Attended: blooming was the maiden's form,
And on her brow Discretion sat, and on
Her rosy cheek a thousand graces play'd.
O luckless was the day, when Cupid's dart,
Shot from a gentle swain's alluring eye,
First thrill'd with pleasing pangs her throbbing breast!
That gentle swain, ah! gentle now no more,
(Horrid to tell!) by sudden phrensy driven,
Ran howling to the wild: blood tintured fire
Glared from his haggard eyeballs, and on high
The hand of Horror raised his ragged hair,
And cold sweat bathed his agonizing frame.
What didst thou then, Dione! ill star'd maid!
What couldst thou do! From morn to dewy eve,
From eve till rosy-finger'd morn appear'd,
In a sad song, a song of ancient days,
Warbling her wild woe to the pitying winds,
She sat; the weeping willow was her theme,
And well the theme accorded with her woe;

This happens when the attention is totally engrossed by some very great object; admiration being one of those emotions that rather suspend the exercise of the faculties, than push them into action. And here too the simplest language is the most natural; as when Milton says of the Deity, that he sits "highthroned above all height." And as this simplicity is more suitable to that one great exertion which occupies the speaker's mind, than a more elaborate imagery or language would have been; so has it also a more powerful effect in fixing and elevating the imagination of the hearer: for, to introduce other thoughts for the sake of illustrating what cannot be illustrated, could answer no other purpose, than to draw off the attention from the

Till fate suppress'd at length th' unfinish'd lay.
Thus on Meander's flowery mantled side
The dying cygnet sings, and singing dies.

I hope my young readers are all wiser; but I believe that there was a time when I should have been tempted to prefer this flashy tinsel to Shakspeare's fine gold. I do not say, that in themselves these lines are all bad, though several of them are; and in some sorts of composition the greater part might perhaps be pardonable; but I say, that, considered in relation to the character and circumstances of Desdemona, they are all unnatural, and therefore not poetical.

principal idea. In these and the like cases, the fancy left to itself will have more satisfaction in pursuing at leisure its own speculations, than in attending to those of others; as they who see for the first time some admirable object, would choose rather to feast upon it in silence, than to have their thoughts interrupted by a long description from another person, informing them of nothing but what they see before them, are already acquainted with, or may easily conceive. On these principles, I cannot but think, that Milton's elaborate account of the creation of light,* excellent as it is in many particulars, is yet far less striking to the mind, than that famous passage of Moses, so justly admired by Longinus for its sublimity, "And God said, let there be light; and there was light." When I contemplate the idea suggested by these few simple words, I fancy myself encompassed with the darkness of chaos; that I hear the Almighty

- * Let there be light, God said; and forthwith light
Etherial, first of things, quintessence pure,
Sprung from the deep, and from her native east
To journey through the aery gloom began,
Sphered in a radiant cloud; for yet the sun
Was not; she in a cloudy tabernacle
Sojourn'd the while.

Parad. Lost, vii. 244.

word, and the same instant see light diffused over all the immensity of nature. Here an object, the greatest surely that can be imagined, the whole illuminated universe starts at once into view. And the fancy seems to be assisted not a little by the shortness and simplicity of the phrase, which hint the instantaneousness of the effect, and the facility wherewith the first cause operates in producing a work so unutterably beautiful, and so astonishingly great.

But to return from this digression, which was only intended to show, that though some thoughts and emotions require a figurative, others as naturally adopt a simple, style: I remarked, that the *hyperbole*, *prosopopeia*, and *apostrophe*, are among the most passionate figures. This deserves illustration.

1. A very angry man is apt to think the injury he has just received greater than it really is; and if he proceed immediately to retaliate by word or deed, seldom fails to exceed the due bounds, and to become injurious in his turn. The fond parent looks upon his child as a prodigy of genius and beauty; and the romantick lover will not be persuaded that his mistress has nothing supernatural either in her mind or person. Fear, in like manner, not only magnifies its object when real, but even forms an object out of no-

thing, and mistakes the fictions of fancy for the intimations of sense. No wonder then, that they who speak according to the impulse of passion should speak *hyperbolically*: that the angry man should exaggerate the injury he has received, and the vengeance he is going to inflict; that the sorrowful should magnify what they have lost, and the joyful what they have obtained; that the lover should speak extravagantly of the beauty of his mistress, the coward of the dangers he has encountered, and the credulous clown of the miracles performed by the juggler. In fact, these people would not do justice to what they feel, if they did not say more than the truth. The valiant man, on the other hand, as naturally adopts the diminishing hyperbole, when he speaks of danger; and the man of sense, when he is obliged to mention his own virtue or ability; because it appears to him, or he is willing to consider it, as less than the truth, or at best as inconsiderable. Contempt uses the same figure; and therefore, Petruchio, affecting that passion, affects also the language of it:

Thou liest, thou thread, thou thimble,
Thou yard, three quarters, half yard, quarter, nail,
Thou flea, thou nit, thou winter cricket, thou!
Braved in mine own house with a skein of thread!
Away, thou rag, thou quantity, thou remnant!*

* Taming of the shrew, act 4. sc. 1.

For some passions consider their objects as important, and others as unimportant. Of the former sort are anger, love, fear, admiration, joy, sorrow, pride; of the latter are contempt and courage. Those may be said to subdue the mind to the object; and these, to subdue the object to the mind. And the former, when violent, always magnify their objects; whence the hyperbole called amplification, or *auxesis*; and the latter as constantly diminish theirs; and give rise to the hyperbole called *meiosis*, or diminution. Even when the mind cannot be said to be under the influence of any violent passion, we naturally employ the same figure, when we would impress another very strongly with any idea. He is a walking shadow; he is worn to skin and bone; he has one foot in the grave, and the other following; these and the like phrases are proved to be natural by their frequency. By introducing great ideas, the hyperbole is further useful in poetry, as a source of the sublime; but, when employed injudiciously, is very apt to become ridiculous. Cowley makes Goliath as big as the hill down which he was marching;* and tells us, that when he came into the valley, he seemed to fill

* Davideis, book 3.

it, and to overtop the neighbouring mountains, (which, by the by, seems rather to lessen the mountains and valleys, than to magnify the giant;) nay he adds, that the sun started back when he saw the splendour of his arms. This poet seems to have thought, that the figure in question could never be sufficiently enormous; but Quintilian would have taught him, "*Quamvis omnis hyperbole ultra fidem, non tamen esse debet ultra modum.*" The reason is, that this figure, when excessive, betokens rather absolute infatuation than intense emotion; and resembles the efforts of a ranting tragedian, or the ravings of an enthusiastick declaimer, who, by putting on the gestures and looks of a lunatick, satisfy the discerning part of their audience, that, instead of feeling strongly, they have no rational feelings at all. In the wildest energies of nature there is a modesty, which the imitative artist will be careful never to overstep.

2. That figures, by which things are spoken of as if they were persons, is called *prosopopeia*, or personification. It is a bold figure, and yet is often natural. Long acquaintance recommends to some share in our affection even things inanimate, as a house, a tree, a rock, a mountain, a country; and were we to leave such a thing, without hope of return, we should be

inclined to address it with a farewell, as if it were a percipient creature. Nay, we find that ignorant nations have actually worshipped such things, or considered them as the haunt of certain powerful beings. Dryads and hamadryads were by the Greeks and Romans supposed to preside over trees and groves; river gods and nymphs over streams and fountains; little deities, called *lares* and *penates*, were believed to be the guardians of hearths and houses. In Scotland there is hardly a hill remarkable for the beauty of its shade that was not in former times thought to be the habitation of fairies. Nay modern as well as ancient superstition has appropriated the waters to a peculiar sort of demon or goblin, and peopled the very regions of death, the tombs and charnel houses, with multitudes of ghosts and phantoms. Besides, when things inanimate make a strong impression upon us, whether agreeable or otherwise, we are apt to address them in terms of affection or dislike. The sailor blesses the plank that brought him ashore from the shipwreck; and the passionate man, and sometimes even the philosopher, will say bitter words to the stumbling block that gave him a fall. Moreover, a man agitated with any interesting passion, especially of long continuance, is apt to fancy that all nature sympathizes

with him. If he has lost a beloved friend, he thinks the sun less bright than at other times; and in the sighing of the winds and groves, in the lowings of the herd, and in the murmurs of the stream, he seems to hear the voice of lamentation. But when joy or hope predominate, the whole world assumes a gay appearance. In the contemplation of every part of nature, of every condition of mankind, of every form of human society, the benevolent and the pious man, the morose and the cheerful, the miser and the misanthrope, finds occasion to indulge his favourite passion, and sees, or thinks he sees, his own temper reflected back in the actions, sympathies, and tendencies of other things and persons. Our affections are indeed the medium through which we may be said to survey ourselves, and every thing else; and whatever be our inward frame we are apt to perceive a wonderful congeniality in the world without us. And hence, the fancy, when roused by real emotions, or by the pathos of composition, is easily reconciled to those figures of speech that ascribe sympathy, perception and the other attributes of animal life, to things inanimate, or even to notions merely intellectual. Motion, too, bears a close affinity to action, and affects our imagination nearly in the same manner;

and we see a great part of nature in motion; and by their sensible effects are led to contemplate energies innumerable. These conduct the rational mind to the great First Cause; and these, in times of ignorance, disposed the vulgar to believe in a variety of subordinate agents employed in producing those appearances that could not otherwise be accounted for. Hence an endless train of fabulous deities, and of witches, demons, fairies, genii; which if they prove our reason weak and our fancy strong, prove also that personification is natural to the human mind; and that a right use of this figure may have a powerful effect, in fabulous writing especially, to engage our sympathy in behalf of things as well as persons, for nothing (as was before observed) can give lasting delight to a moral being, but that which awakens sympathy, and touches the heart: and though it be true, that we sympathize in some degree even with inanimate things, yet what has, or is supposed to have, life, calls forth a more sincere and more permanent fellow feeling. Let it be observed further, that to awaken our sympathetick feelings, a lively conception of their object is necessary. This indeed is true of almost all our emotions; their keenness is in proportion to the vivacity of the perceptions that excite them.

Distress that we see is more affecting than what we only hear of;* a perusal of the gayest scenes in a comedy does not rouse the mind so effectually, as the presence of a cheerful companion; and the death of a friend is of greater energy in producing seriousness, and the consideration of our latter end, than all the pathos of Young. Of descriptions addressed to the fancy, those that are most vivid and picturesque will generally be found to have the most powerful influence over our affections;† and those that exhibit persons engaged in action, and adorned with visible *insignia*, give a brisker impulse to the faculties, than such as convey intellectual ideas only, or images taken from still life. No abstract notion of time, or of love, can be so striking to the fancy, as the image of an old man accoutered with a scythe, or of a beautiful boy with wings and a bow and arrows: and no physiological account of frenzy could suggest so vivid

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 180.

† I say *generally*; for it is not always so: Descriptions of very great or terrible objects have sometimes a greater effect upon the mind, when expressed with some degree of obscurity, where "more is meant than meets the ear," than if they had been pictured out in the most lively manner. See part 1. chap. 5. § 4.

an idea, as the poet has given us in that exquisite portrait,

And moody madness laughing wild, amid severest woe.

And for this reason partly it is, that the epick poet, in order to work the more effectually upon our passions and imagination, refers the secret springs of human conduct, and the vicissitudes of human affairs, to the agency of personified causes; that is, to the machinery of gods and goddesses, angels, demons, magicians, and other powerful beings. And hence, in all sublime poetry, life and motion, with their several modes and attributes, are liberally bestowed on those objects wherewith the author intends that we should be strongly impressed: scenes perfectly inanimate, and still tending rather to diffuse a langour over the mind, than to communicate to our internal powers those lively energies, without which a being essentially active can never receive complete gratification. Lastly, some violent passions are peculiarly inclined to change things into persons. The horrors of his mind haunted Orestes in the shape of furies. Conscience, in the form of the murdered person, stares the murderer in the face, and often terrifies him to distraction. The superstitious man travelling alone in the

dark, mistakes a white stone for a ghost, a bush for a demon, a tree waving with the wind for an enormous giant brandishing a hundred arms. The lunatick and enthusiast converse with persons who exist only in their own distempered fancy: and the glutton, and the miser, if they were to give utterance to all their thoughts, would often, I dare say, speak, the one of his gold, the other of his belly, not only as a person, but as a god: the object of his warmest love and most devout regard. More need not be said to prove, that personification is natural, and may frequently contribute to the pathos, energy and beauty of poetick language.

3. *Apostrophe*, or a sudden diversion of speech from one person to another person or thing, is a figure nearly related to the former. Poets sometimes make use of it, in order to help out their verse, or merely to give variety to their style; but on those occasions it is to be considered as rather a trick of art, than an effort of nature. It is most natural, and most pathetick, when the person or thing to whom the apostrophe is made, and for whose sake we give a new direction to our speech, is in our eyes eminently distinguished for good or evil, or raises within us some sudden and powerful emotion, such as the hearer would acquiesce

in, or at least acknowledge to be reasonable. But this, like the other pathetick figures, must be used with great prudence. For if, instead of calling forth the hearer's sympathy, it should only betray the levity of the speaker, or such wanderings of his mind as neither the subject nor the occasion would lead one to expect, it will then create disgust, instead of approbation. The orator, therefore, must not attempt the passionate apostrophe, till the minds of the hearers be prepared to join in it. And every audience is not equally obsequious in this respect. In the forum of ancient Rome that would have passed for sublime and pathetick, which in the most respectable British auditories would appear ridiculous. For our style of public speaking is cool and argumentative, and partakes less of enthusiasm than the Roman did, and much less than the modern French or Italian. Of British eloquence, particularly that of the pulpit, the chief recommendations are gravity and simplicity. And it is vain to say, that our oratory *ought* to be more vehement: for that matter depends on causes, which it is not only inexpedient, but impossible to alter; namely, on the character and spirit of the people, and their rational notions in regard to religion, policy, and literature. The exclamations

of Cicero would weigh but little in our parliament; and many of those which we meet with in French sermons would not be more effectual if attempted in our pulpit. To see one of our preachers, who the moment before was a cool reasoner, a temperate speaker, an humble christian, and an orthodox divine, break out into a sudden apostrophe to the immortal powers, or to the walls of the church, tends to force a smile, rather than a tear, from those among us who reflect, that there is nothing in the subject, and should be nothing in the orator, to warrant such wanderings of fancy, or vehemence of emotion. If he be careful to cultivate a pure style, and a grave and graceful utterance, a British clergyman, who speaks from conviction the plain unaffected words of truth and soberness, of benevolence and piety, will, if I mistake not, convey more pathetick, as well as more permanent, impressions to the heart, and be more useful as a christian teacher, than if he were to put in practice all the attitudes of Roscius, and all the tropes and figures of Cicero.

But where the language of passion and enthusiasm is permitted to display itself, whatever raises any strong emotion, whether it be animated or inanimate, absent or present, sensible

or intellectual, may give rise to the apostrophe. A man in a distant country, speaking of the place of his birth, might naturally exclaim, "O my dear native land, shall I never see thee more!" Or, when some great misfortune befalls him, "Happy are ye, O my parents, that ye are not alive to see this." We have a beautiful apostrophe in the third book of the *Eneid*, where Eneas, who is telling his story to Dido, happening to mention the death of his father, makes a sudden address to him as follows:

—— hic, pelagi, tot tempestatibus actus,
Heu, genitorem, omnis curæ casusque levamen,
Amitto Anchisen;—hic me, pater optime, fessum
Deseris, heu, tantis nequicquam erepte periclis!

This apostrophe has a pleasing effect. It seems to intimate, that the love which the hero bore his father was so great, that when he mentioned him, he forgot every thing else: and, without minding his company, one of whom was a queen, suddenly addressed himself to that which, though present only in idea, was still a principal object of his affection. An emotion so warm and so reasonable cannot fail to command the sympathy of the reader. When Michael, in the eleventh book of *Paradise Lost*, announces to Adam and Eve the neces-

sity of their immediate departure from the garden of Eden, the poet's art in preserving the decorum of the two characters is very remarkable. Pierced to the heart at the thought of leaving that happy place, Eve, in all the violence of ungovernable sorrow, breaks forth into a pathetick apostrophe to Paradise, to the flowers she had reared, and to the nuptial bower she had adorned. Adam makes no address to the walks, the trees, or the flowers of the garden, the loss whereof did not so much afflict him; but, in his reply to the archangel, expresses without a figure, his regret for being banished from a place where he had so oft been honoured with a sensible manifestation of the Divine Presence. The use of the apostrophe in the one case, and the omission of it in the other; not only gives a beautiful variety to the style, but also marks that superiour elevation and composure of mind, by which the poet had all along distinguished the character of Adam. One of the finest applications of this figure that is any where to be seen, is in the fourth book of the same poem; where the author, catching by sympathy the devotion of our first parents, suddenly drops his narrative, and joins his voice to theirs in adoring the Father of the universe.

Thus at their shady lodge arrived, both stood,
 Both turn'd, and under open sky adored
 The God that made both sky, air, earth, and heaven,
 Which they beheld, the moon's resplendent globe,
 And starry pole:—Thou also mad'st the night,
 Maker Omnipotent, and thou the day,
 Which we in our appointed work employ'd
 Have finish'd. —

Milton took the hint of this fine contrivance
 from a well known passage of Virgil:

Hic juvenum chorus, ille senum; qui carmine laudes
 Herculeas et facta ferant; —

———— ut duros mille labores

Rege sub Eurystheo, fatis Junonis iniquæ
 Pertulerit:—Tu nubigenas, invicte, bimembres
 Hylæum Pholoumque manu; tu Cresia mactas
 Prodigia. ———*

The beauty arising from diversified composition
 is the same in both, and very great in each.
 But every reader must *feel*, that the figure is
 incomparably more affecting to the mind in the
 imitation, than in the original. So true it is,
 that the most rational emotions raise the most
 intense fellow feeling; and that the apostrophe
 is then the most emphatical, when it displays

* See a similar instance, Tasso Gier. lib. 18. st. 14.

those workings of human affection, which are at once ardent, and well founded.

A full discussion of the present topick would require a methodical and more particular account of the several tropes and figures, their congruity to human emotions, and their effects in composition. But these few remarks will perhaps be thought to prove with sufficient evidence, the utility of figurative expression in making language more *pleasing* and more *natural*. I shall therefore only add, that tropes and figures, particularly the *metaphor*, *similitude*, and *allegory*, are further useful in beautifying language, by suggesting, together with the thoughts essential to the subject, an endless variety of agreeable images, for which there would be no place, if writers were always to confine themselves to the *proper* names of things. And this beauty and variety, judiciously applied, is so far from distracting, that it tends rather to fix, the attention, and captivate the heart of the reader, by giving light, and life, and pathos to the whole composition.

II. The end of poetry, above all other literary arts, is to please by imitating nature. I have now shown, that by tropes and figures language may be made more natural and more pleasing, than it could be without them. It follows, that

tropes and figures are more necessary to poetry, than to any other mode of writing: which is the second point proposed to be illustrated in this section.

The same point might be proved from other considerations. Language, as shown already, is then natural, when it is suitable to the supposed condition of the poet; because figures are suggested by the fancy; and the fancy of him who composes poetry is more employed, than that of any other author. Of all historical, philosophical, and theological researches, the object is *real* truth, which is fixed and permanent. The aim of rhetorical declamation (according to Cicero) is *apparent* truth; which, being less determinate, leaves the fancy of the speaker more free, gives greater scope to the inventive powers, and supplies the materials of a more figurative phraseology. But the poet is subject to no restraints, but those of verisimilitude; which is still less determinate than rhetorical truth. He seeks not to convince the judgment of his reader by arguments of either real or apparent cogency; he means only to please and interest him, by an appeal to his sensibility and imagination. His own imagination is therefore continually at work, ranging through the whole of real and probable exist-

ence, "glancing from heaven to earth, from "earth to heaven," in quest of images and ideas suited to the emotions he himself feels, and to the sympathies he would communicate to others. And, consequently, figures of speech, the offspring of excursive fancy, must (if he speak according to what he is supposed to think and feel, that is according to his supposed condition) tincture the language of the poet more than that of any other composer. So that, if figurative diction be unnatural in geometry, because all wanderings of fancy are unsuitable, and even impossible, to the geometrician, while intent upon his argument; it is, upon the same principle, perfectly natural, and even unavoidable in poetry; because the more a poet attends to his subject, and the better qualified he is to do it justice, the more active will his imagination be, and the more diversified the ideas that present themselves to his mind. Besides, the true poet addresses himself to the passions and sympathies of mankind; which, till his own be raised, he cannot hope to do with success. And it is the nature of many passions, though not of all, to increase the activity of imagination; and an active imagination naturally vents itself in figurative language; nay, unless restrained by a correct taste, has a tendency to exceed in it; of

which bishop Taylor, and lord Verulam, two geniuses different in kind, but of the highest order, are memorable examples.

I said, that "the poet seeks not to convince the judgment of his reader by arguments of either real or apparent cogency." I do not mean, that in poetry argument has no place. The most legitimate reasoning, the soundest philosophy, and narratives purely historical, may appear in a poem, and contribute greatly to the honour of the author, and to the importance of his work. All this we have in *Paradise Lost*. I mean, that what distinguishes *pure* poetry from other writing, is its aptitude, not to sway the judgment by reasoning, but to please the fancy, and move the passions, by a lively imitation of nature. Nor would I exclude poetical embellishment from history, or even from philosophy. Plato's dialogues and Addison's moral essays abound in poetick imagery; and Livy and Tacitus often amuse their readers with poetical description. In like manner, though geometry and physicks be different sciences: though abstract ideas be the subject, and pure demonstration or intuition the evidence, of the former; and though the material universe, and the informations of sense, be the subject and the evidence of the latter;

yet have these sciences been united by the best philosophers, and very happy effects resulted from the union. In one and the same work, poetry, history, philosophy, and oratory, may doubtless be blended; nay, these arts have all been actually blended in one and the same work, not by Milton only, but also by Homer, Virgil, Lucan, and Shakspeare. Yet still these arts are different: different in their ends, and principles, and in the faculties of the mind to which they are respectively addressed: and it is easy to perceive, when a writer employs one, and when another.

III. A reason why tropes and figures are more necessary in some sorts of poetry, than in others, it is not difficult to assign. This depends on the condition of the supposed speaker, particularly on the state of his imagination and passions. When the soul pines with sorrow, or languishes in love, it keeps its view more steadily fixed on one or a few ideas, than when it is possessed with enthusiasm, or agitated by jealousy, revenge, indignation, anxiety, or any other turbulent emotion. In the former case it is inactive; in the latter, restless;

——— *Magno curarum fluctuat æstu,
Atque animum nunc huc celerem, nunc dividit illuc,
In partesque rapit varias, perque omnia versat;*

and therefore in the one case it will be occupied by few ideas, and in the other by many. The style, therefore, of the amorous or mournful elegy, in order to be imitative of the language of sorrow or desponding love, must be simpler, and less diversified by figures, than that of the dithyrambick song, or of any other poem in which the speaker is supposed to be greatly agitated.

I have heard the finest ode in the world blamed for the boldness of its figures, and for what the critick was pleased to call obscurity. He had, I suppose, formed his taste upon Anacreon and Waller, whose odes are indeed very simple, and would have been very absurd, if they had not been simple. But let us recollect the circumstances of Anacreon, (considered as the speaker of his own poetry) and of Gray's Welsh Bard. The former warbles his lays, reclining on a bed of flowers, dissolved in tranquillity and indolence, while all his faculties seem to be engrossed by one or a few pleasurable objects. The latter, just escaped from the massacre of his brethren, under the complicated agitations of grief, revenge, and despair; and surrounded with the scenery of rocks, mountains, and torrents, stupendous by nature, and now rendered hideous by desolation, im-

precates perdition upon the bloody Edward; and, seized with prophetick enthusiasm, foretels in the most alarming strains, and typifies by the most dreadful images, the disasters that were to overtake his family and descendents. If perspicuity and simplicity be natural in the songs of Anacreon, as they certainly are, a figurative style and desultory composition are no less natural in this inimitable performance of Gray. And if real prophecy must always be so obscure, as not to be fully understood till it is accomplished, because otherwise it would interfere with the free agency of man, that poem which imitates the style of prophecy, must also, if natural, be to a certain degree obscure; not indeed in the images of words, but in the allusions. And it is in the allusions only, not in the words or images, (for these are most emphatical and picturesque) that the poem partakes of obscurity; and even its allusions will hardly seem obscure to those who are acquainted with the history of England. Those criticks, therefore, who find fault with this poem, because it is not so simple as the songs of Anacreon, or the love verses of Shenstone and Waller, may as well blame Shakspeare, because Othello does not speak in the sweet and simple language of Desdemona. Horace

has no where attempted a theme of such animation and sublimity, as this of Gray; and yet Horace, like his master Pindar, is often bold in his transitions, and in the style of many of his odes extremely figurative. But this we not only excuse, but applaud, when we consider, that in those odes the assumed character of the speaker is enthusiasm, which in all its operations is somewhat violent, and must therefore give a peculiar vehemence both to thought and to language.

On what principle, then, it may be said, are we to look for simplicity and exact arrangement, in the style of an epick poem? Why is not the language of the Iliad and Eneid as figurative as that of Pindar? To this I answer, first, That the assumed character of the epick poet is calm inspiration, the effects whereof upon the mind must be supposed to be very different from those produced by enthusiasm or prophetick rapture; regularity and composure being as essential to the former, as wildness and vehemence are to the latter: and, secondly, That a very figurative style continued through a long work becomes tiresome; and therefore, that all poems of great length ought to be methodical in the plan, and simple in the execution. Abrupt transition, boldness of figure, and

thoughts elevated almost to extravagance, may please in a short poem, as the dainties of a banquet, and the splendour of a triumph, may amuse for a day: but much feasting destroys health, and perpetual glare and tumult stupify the senses; and the high lyric style continued through many pages would fatigue the attention, confound the judgment, and bewilder the fancy.

CHAPTER II.

Of the Sound of Poetical Language.

IT is folly to prefer sound to sense. Yet the ear, like every other perceptive faculty, is capable of gratification; and therefore to the sound of words some regard is to be had, even in prose. For ill sounding language can never be agreeable, either to the hearer or to the speaker; and of different modifications of well sounding language some will be found to be more agreeable than others. It is the business of the poet to make his style as agreeable, and consequently as pleasing to the ear, as the nature of the subject will allow. And to the harmony of language it behooves him, more than any other writer, to attend; as it is more especially his concern to render his work pleasurable. In fact we find, that no poet was ever popular who did not possess the art of harmonious composition.

What I have to say on the subject of poetical harmony may be referred to one or other of these heads: sweetness, measure, and imitation.

I. In order to give *sweetness* to language, either in verse or prose, all words of harsh sound, difficult pronunciation, or unwieldy magnitude, are to be avoided as much as possible, unless when they have in the sound something peculiarly emphatical; and words are to be so placed in respect of one another, as that discordant combinations may not result from their union. But in poetry this is more necessary than in prose; poetical language being understood to be an imitation of natural language improved to that perfection which is consistent with probability. To poetry, therefore, a greater latitude must be allowed than to prose, in expressing, by tropes and figures of pleasing sound, those ideas whereof the proper names are in any respect offensive, either to the ear or to the fancy.*

II. How far versification or *regular measure* may be essential to this art, has been disputed by critical writers; some holding it to be indispensably necessary, and some not necessary at all. Without recapitulating what has been said by others, I shall only deliver my own opinion, which, if I mistake not, will be found consistent with the principles already established.

* See part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3. § 1, 2.

First, then, I am of opinion, that to poetry verse is not essential. In a prose work, we may have the fable, the arrangement, and a great deal of the pathos, and language, of poetry; and such a work is certainly a poem, though perhaps not a perfect one. For how absurd would it be to say, by changing the position only of a word or two in each line, one might divest Homer's Iliad of the poetical character. At this rate, the arts of poetry and versification would be the same; and the rules in Despauter's grammar, and the moral distichs ascribed to Cato, would be as real poetry as any part of Virgil. In fact, some very ancient poems, when translated into a modern tongue, are far less poetical in verse than in prose; the alterations necessary to adapt them to our numbers being detrimental to their sublime simplicity; of which any person of taste will be sensible, who compares our common prose version of Job, the Psalms, and Song of Solomon, with the best metrical paraphrase of those books that has yet appeared.* Nay, in many cases, comedy will be

* Madame Dacier, zealous to vindicate her Homer, seems to carry the encomium on prose translation rather too far, when she exclaims, "Ouy, je ne crains point de le dire, et je pourrois le prouver, les poëtes traduits en vers cessent d'être poëtes." But she is

more poetical, because more pleasing and natural, in prose, than in verse. By versifying Tom Jones and the Merry Wives of Windsor, we should spoil the two finest comick poems, the one epick, the other dramatical, now in the world.

But, secondly, Though verse be not essential to poetry, it is necessary to the perfection of all poetry that admits of it. Verse is to poetry, what colours are to painting.* A painter might display great genius, and draw masterly figures with chalk or ink; but if he intend a perfect picture, he must employ in his work as many colours as are seen in the object he imitates. Or, to adopt a beautiful comparison of Demosthenes,

right in what she says a little after: “En fait de traduction, il y a *souvent* dans la prose une précision, une beauté, et une force, dont la poésie ne puet approcher. Les livres des Prophetes, et les Pseaumes, dans la vulgate meme, sont pleins de passages, que le plus grand poete du monde ne scauroit rendre en vers, sans leur faire perdre de leur majesté et de leur énergie.” *Preface a l’Iliade de Mad. Dacier, p. 39.*

* Horace seems to hint at the same comparison, when, after specifying the several sorts of verse suitable to epick, elegiack, lyrick, and dramattick poetry, he adds,

Descriptas servare vices, operumque colores,
Cur ego, si nequeo ignoroque, Poeta salutor?

Ar. Poet. vers. 86.

quoted by Aristotle,† “Versification is to poetry what bloom is to the human countenance.”

A good face is agreeable when the bloom is gone; and good poetry may please without versification; harmonious numbers may set off an indifferent poem, and a fine bloom indifferent features: but without verse, poetry is incomplete; and beauty is not perfect, unless to sweetness and regularity of feature there be superadded,

The bloom of young desire and purple light of love.

If numbers are necessary to the perfection of the higher poetry, they are no less so to that of the lower kinds, to pastoral, song, and satire, which have little besides the language and versification to distinguish them from prose; and which some ancient authors are unwilling to admit to the rank of poems; though I think it too nice a scruple, both because such writings are commonly termed poetical, and also because there is, even in them, something that may not improperly be considered as an imitation of nature.

That the rhythm and measures of verse are naturally agreeable; and therefore, that by these poetry may be made more pleasing than it would

† Aristot. Rhetor. lib. 3. cap. 4.

-be without them, is evident from this, that children and illiterate people, whose admiration we cannot suppose to be the effect of habit or prejudice, are exceedingly delighted with them. In many proverbial sayings, where there is neither rhyme nor alliteration,* rhythm is obviously studied. Nay, the use of rhythm in poetry is universal: whereas alliteration and rhyme, though relished by some nations, are not much sought after by others. And we need not be at a loss to account for the agreeableness of proportion and order, if we reflect, that they suggest the agreeable ideas of contrivance and skill, at the same time that they render the connection of things obvious to the understanding, and imprint it deeply on the memory.† Verse, by promoting distinct and easy remembrance, conveys ideas to the mind with energy, and enlivens every emotion the poet intends to raise in the reader or hearer. Besides, when we attend to verses, after hearing one or two, we become acquainted with the measure, which therefore we always look for in the sequel. This perpetual interchange of hope and gratification is a source of delight; and to this in part is owing the pleasure we take

* See Essay on Laughter, chap. 2. sect. 3.

† On the effects of rhythm in musick, see above, part 1. chap. 6. sect. 2. § 4.

in the rhymes of modern poetry. And hence we see, that though an incorrect rhyme, or untunable verse, be in itself, and compared with an important sentiment, a very trifling matter; yet it is no trifle in regard to its effects on the hearer; because it brings disappointment, and so gives a temporary shock to the mind, and interrupts the current of the affections; and because it suggests the disagreeable ideas of negligence or want of skill on the part of the author. And therefore, as the publick ear becomes more delicate, the negligence will be more glaring, and the disappointment more intensely felt; and correctness of rhyme and of measure will of course be the more indispensable. In our tongue, rhyme is more necessary to lyrick, than to heroick poetry. The reason seems to be, that in the latter the ear can of itself perceive the boundary of the measure, because the lines are all of equal length nearly, and every good reader makes a short pause at the end of each; whereas, in the former, the lines vary in length; and therefore the rhyme is requisite to make the measure and rhythm sufficiently perceptible. Custom too may have some influence. English odes without rhyme are uncommon; and therefore have something awkward about them, or something at least to

which the publick ear is not yet thoroughly reconciled.

Moreover, in poetry, as in musick, rhythm is the source of much pleasing variety; of variety tempered with uniformity, and regulated by art: insomuch, that, notwithstanding the likeness of one hexameter verse to another, it is not common, either in Virgil or in Homer, to meet with two contiguous hexameters, whose rhythm is exactly the same. And though all English heroick verses consist of five feet, among which the iambick predominates; yet this measure, in respect of rhythm alone, is susceptible of more than thirty varieties. And let it be remarked further, that different kinds of verse, by being adapted to different subjects and modes of writing, give variety to the poetick language, and multiply the charms of this pleasing art.

What has formerly been shown to be true in regard to style, will also in many cases hold true of versification, "that it is then *natural* "when it is adapted to the *supposed condition* "of the speaker." In the epopee, the poet assumes the character of calm inspiration; and therefore his language must be elevated, and his numbers majestick and uniform. A peasant speaking in heroick or hexameter verse is no

improbability here; because his words are supposed to be transmitted by one who will of his own accord give them every ornament necessary to reduce them into dignified measure; as an eloquent man, in a solemn assembly, recapitulating the speech of a clown, would naturally express it in pure and perspicuous language. The uniform heroick measure will suit any subject of dignity, whether narrative or didactick, that admits or requires uniformity of style. In tragedy, where the imitation of real life is more perfect than in epick poetry, the uniform magnificence of epick numbers might be improper; because the heroes and heroines are supposed to speak in their own persons, and according to the immediate impulse of passion and sentiment. Yet even in tragedy, the versification may be both harmonious and dignified; because the characters are taken chiefly from high life, and the events from a remote period; and because the higher poetry is permitted to imitate nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection, in which it might be. The Greeks and Romans considered their hexameter as too artificial for dramatick poetry, and therefore in tragedy, and even in comedy, made use of the iambick, and some other measures that came near the cadence of conversa-

tion: we use the iambick, both in the epick and dramattick poem; but, for the most part, it is, or ought to be, much more elaborate in the former, than in the latter. In dramattick comedy, where the manners and concerns of familiar life are exhibited, verse would seem to be unnatural, except it be so like the sound of common discourse, as to be hardly distinguishable from it. Custom, however, may in some countries determine otherwise; and against custom, in these matters, it is vain to argue. The professed enthusiasm of the dithyrambick poet renders wildness, variety, and a sonorous harmony of numbers peculiarly suitable to his odes. The love sonnet, and anacreontick song will be less various, more regular, and of a softer harmony; because the state of mind expressed in it has more composure. Philosophy can scarce go further, in this investigation, without deviating into whim and hypothesis. The particular sorts of verse, to be adopted in the lower species of poetry, are determined by fashion chiefly, and the practice of approved authors.

III. The origin and principles of imitative harmony, or of that artifice by which the sound is made, as Pope says, "an echo to the sense," may be explained in the following manner.

It is pleasing to observe the uniformity of

nature in all her operations. Between moral and material beauty and harmony, between moral and material deformity and dissonance, there obtains a very striking analogy. The visible and audible expressions of almost every virtuous emotion are agreeable to the eye and the ear, and those of almost every criminal passion disagreeable. The looks, the attitudes, and the vocal sounds, natural to benevolence, to gratitude, to compassion, to piety, are in themselves graceful and pleasing; while anger, discontent, despair, and cruelty bring discord to the voice, deformity to the features, and distortion to the limbs. That flowing curve, which painters know to be essential to the beauty of animal shape, gives place to a multiplicity of right lines and sharp angles in the countenance and gesture of him who knits his brows, stretches his nostrils, grinds his teeth, and clenches his fist; whereas devotion, magnanimity, benevolence, contentment, and good humour, soften the attitude, and give a more graceful swell to the outline of every feature. Certain vocal tones accompany certain mental emotions. The voice of sorrow is feeble and broken, that of despair boisterous and incoherent; joy assumes a sweet and sprightly note, fear a weak and tremulous cadence; the tones of love and benevolence are

musical and uniform, those of rage loud and dissonant; the voice of the sedate reasoner is equable and grave, but not unpleasant; and he who declaims with energy employs many varieties of modulation suited to the various emotions that predominate in his discourse.

But it is not in the language of passion only that the human voice varies its tone, or the human face its features. Every striking sentiment, and every interesting idea, has an effect upon it. One would esteem that person no adept in narrative eloquence, who should describe with the very same accent, swift and slow motion, extreme labour and easy performance, agreeable sensation and excruciating pain; who should talk of the tumult of a tempestuous ocean, the roar of thunder, the devastations of an earthquake, or an Egyptian pyramid tumbling into ruins, in the same tone of voice wherewith he describes the murmur of a rill, the warbling of the harp of Eolus, the swinging of a cradle, or the descent of an angel. Elevation of mind gives dignity to the voice. From Achilles, Sarpedon, and Othello, we should as naturally expect a manly and sonorous accent, as a nervous style of majestick attitude. Coxcombs and bullies, while they assume airs of

importance and valour, affect also a dignified articulation.

Since the tones of natural language are so various, poetry, which imitates the language of nature, must also vary its tones; and, in respect of sound as well as of meaning, be framed after that model of ideal perfection, which the variety and energy of the human articulate voice render probable. This is the more easily accomplished, because, in every language, there is between the sound and sense of certain words a perceptible analogy; which, though not so accurate as to lead a foreigner from the sound to the signification,* is yet ac-

* There is in Tasso's *Gierusalemme Liberata* a famous stanza of which Rousseau says, that a good ear and sincere heart are alone sufficient to enable one to judge of it. The imitative harmony and the poetry are indeed admirable; but I doubt whether a person who understands neither Italian nor Latin could even guess at the meaning from the sound. I have attempted it in English, but am sensible of my inability to do it justice.

Chiama gli habitator de l'ombre eterne
Il rauco suon de la tartarea tromba:
Treman le spaciose atre caverne,
Et l'aer cieco a quel rumor rimbomba;
Ne stridendo così da le superne
Regioni del cielo il folgor piomba;

curate enough to show, that, in forming such words, regard has been had to the imitative qualities of vocal sound. Such, in English, are the words yell, crash, crack, hiss, roar, murmur, and many others.

All the particular laws that regulate this sort of imitation, as far as they are founded in nature, and liable to the cognisance of philosophy, depend on the general law of style above mentioned. Together with the other circumstances of the supposed speaker, the poet takes into consideration the tone of voice suitable to the ideas that occupy his mind, and thereto adapts the sound of his language, if it can be done consistently with ease and elegance of expression. But when this imitative harmony is too much sought after, or words appear to be chosen

Ne si Scossa giamai trema la terra,
Quando i vapori in sen gravida serra.

Can. 4. st. 4.

To call the tribes that roam the Stygian shores,
The hoarse Tartarean trump in thunder roars;
Hell through her trembling caverns starts aghast,
And Night's black void rebellows to the blast:
Far less the peal that rends th' etherial world,
When bolts of vengeance from on high are hurl'd;
Far less the shock that heaves earth's tottering frame,
When its torn entrails spout th' imprison'd flame.

for sound rather than sense, the verse becomes finical and ridiculous.*

Words by their sound may imitate sound; and quick or slow articulation may imitate quick or slow motion. Hence by a proper choice and arrangement of words, the poet may imitate *sounds* that are sweet with dignity (*a*)—sweet and

* Such is Ronsard's affected imitation of the song of the skylark:

Elle quindée du zephire
 Sublime en l'air vire et revire,
 Et y declique un joli cris,
 Qui rit, guérit, et tire l'ire
 Des esprits mieux que je n'écris.

This is as ridiculous as that line of Ennius,

Tum tuba terribili sonitu taratantara dixit:

Or as the following verses of Swift;

The man with the kettledrum enters the gate,
 Dub dub a dub dub: the trumpeters follow,
 Tantara tantara; while all the boys hollow.

(*a*) No sooner had th' Almighty ceas'd, than all
 The multitude of angels, with a shout,
 Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
 As from blest voices uttering joy; heaven rung
 With jubilee, and loud hosannas fill'd
 The eternal regions. —

Par. Lost, book 3.

See

tender (*b*)—loud (*c*)—and harsh (*d*);—and *motions* that are slow in consequence of digni-

See also the night storm of thunder, lightning, wind, and rain, in Virg. Georg. lib. 1. vers. 328—334.

(*b*) Et longum, formose, vale, vale, inquit, Iola.

Virg. Ecl. 3.

Formosam resonare doces Amarillida silvas.

Virg. Ecl. 1.

See also the simile of the nightingale, Geor. lib. 4. vers. 511. And see the wonderful couplet describing the wailings of the owl, *Æneid*. IV. 462.

(*c*) ————— vibratus ab æthere fulgor
Cum sonitu venit, et ruerè omnia visa repente,
Tyrrhenusque tubæ mugire per æthera clangor;
Suspiciunt; iterum atque iterum fragor intonat ingens.

Æneid 8.

See also the storm in the first book of the *Eneid*, and in the fifth of the *Odyssey*; and the stanza already quoted from Tasso.

(*d*) The hoarse rough verse should like the torrent roar.

Pope.

————— On a sudden open fly,
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,
Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder ———

Par. Lost, II. 179.

See also Homer's *Iliad*, lib. 3. vers. 363. and Clarke's annotation.

ty (*e*)—slow in consequence of difficulty (*f*)—swift and noisy (*g*)—swift and smooth (*h*)—uneven and abrupt (*k*)—quick and joyous (*m*). An

(*e*) See an exquisite example in Gray's Progress of Poesy; the conclusion of the third stanza.

(*f*) And when up ten steep slopes you've dragg'd your thighs.

Pope.

Just brought out this, when scarce his tongue could stir.

Pope.

—— The hugh leviathan

Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait,

Tempest the ocean. *Par. Lost*, VII. 411.

See the famous description of Sisyphus rolling the stone, *Odyss. lib. 11. vers. 592*. See *Quintil. Inst. Orat. lib. 9. cap. 4. § 4.* compared with *Paradise Lost*, B. 2. vers. 1022.

(*g*) *Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.*

Æneid.

Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ τὰ πιδόνδε κυλίνδεται λάας ἀναιδης. *Odyss. 11.*

See also *Virg. Æneid. lib. 1. vers. 83—87*.

(*h*) See wild as the winds o'er the desert he flies.

Pope.

Ille volat, simul arva fuga, simul æquora verrens. *Virg.*

Ῥηιδὴν τ' ἵππετα πείλα, χαλεπὴν περ ἰῦσα. *Hesiod.*

(*k*) Πολλὰ δ' ἀνάντα κατάντα παράντα τι δοχμια τ' ἡλδον.

Hom.

The lass shriek'd, started up, and shriek'd again.

Anonym.

(*m*) Let the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound,

To

unexpected pause in the verse may also imitate a sudden failure of strength (*n*), or interruption of motion (*o*), or give vivacity to an image or thought, by fixing our attention longer than usual upon the word that precedes it (*p*). More-

To many a youth and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequer'd shade.

Milton's Allegro.

See also Gray's Progress of Poesy, Stanza 3.

(*n*) Ac velut in somnis oculos ubi languida pressit
Nocte quies, nequicquam avidos extendere cursus
Velle videmur:—et in mediis conatibus ægri
Succidimus. ——— *Æneid, 12.*

See also Virg. Georg. lib. 3. vers. 515, 516.

(*o*) For this, besure to night thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stiches that shall pen thy breath up. Urching
Shall exercise upon thee ———
Prospero to Calyban in *the Tempest.*

See Pope's Iliad, XIII. 199.

(*p*) ——— How often from the steep
Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
Celestial voices, to the midnight air,
Sole,—or responsive to each other's note,
Singing their great Creator? ———

Par. Lost, b. 4.

And over them triumphant Death his dart
Shook, ——— but delay'd to strike. *Id.*

See also Hom. Odyss. lib. 9. vers. 290.

over, when we describe great bulk, it is natural for us to articulate slowly even in common discourse; and therefore a line of poetry that requires a slow pronounciation, or seems longer then it should be, may be used with good effect in describing vastness of size (*q*). Sweet and smooth numbers are most proper, when the poet paints agreeable objects, or gentle energy (*r*); and harsher sounds when he speaks of what

(*q*) Thus stretch'd out, huge in length, the arch fiend lay,
Par. Lost.

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen
ademptum. *Virg. Æneid, 3.*

Et magnos membrorum artus, magna ossa, lacertosque
Exiit, atque ingens media consistit arena.
Æneid, 5. vers. 422.

(*r*) Hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori,
Hic nemus, hic ipso tecum consumerer ævo.
Virg. Ecl. 10.

The dumb shall sing, the lame his crutch forego,
And leap, exulting, like the bounding roe.
Pope's Messiah.

See Milton's description of the evening, *Par. Lost*, book
4. vers. 598—609.

Ye gentle gales, beneath my body blow,
And softly lay me on the waves below.
Pope's Sappho.

is ugly, violent, or disagreeable (*). This too is according to the nature of common language; for we generally employ harsher tones of voice to express what we dislike, and more melodious notes to describe the objects of love, complacency, or admiration. Harsh numbers however should not be frequent in poetry. For in this art, as in musick, concord and melody ought always to predominate. And we find in fact, that good poets can occasionally express themselves somewhat harshly, when the subject requires it, and yet preserve the sweetness and majesty of poetical diction. Further, the voice of complaint, pity, love, and all the gentler affections is mild and musical, and should therefore be imitated in musical numbers; while despair, defiance, revenge, and turbulent emotions in general, assume an abrupt and sonorous cadence. Dignity

(*) *Stridenti stipula miserum disperdere carmen.*

Virg. Ecl. 3.

*Immo ego Sardois videar tibi amarior herbis,
Horridior rusco, projecta vilius alga.*

Virg. Ecl. 7.

Neu patriæ validas in viscera vertite vires.

Virg. Æneid. 6.

See also Milton's description of the Lazarhouse in *Paradise Lost*, book 11. vers. 477—492.

of description (*t*), solemn vows (*u*), and all sentiments that proceed from a mind elevated with great ideas (*v*), require a correspondent pomp of language and versification. Lastly: an irregular or uncommon movement in the verse may sometimes be of use, to make the reader conceive an image in a particular manner. Virgil describing horses running over rocky heights at full speed, begins the line with two dactyls, to imitate rapidity, and concludes it with eight long syllables (*w*); which is a very unusual measure but seems well adapted to the thing expressed, namely, to the descent of the animal

(*t*) See Virg. Georg. I. 328. and Homer, Virgil, and Milton, *passim*. See also Dryden's Alexander's Feast, and Gray's Odes.

(*u*) See Virg. Æneid. IV. 24.

(*v*) Examples are frequent in the great authors. See Othello's exclamation:

————— O now for ever
Farewel the tranquil mind! &c. *Act 3. scene 3.*

(*w*) Saxa per, et scopulos, et depressas convalles, *Geor.* III. 276. Milton seems to have imitated this movement, when he says,

————— Eternal wrath
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.

See above, Part 1. chap. 6. sect. 1.

from the hills to the low ground. At any rate this extraordinary change of the rhythm may be allowed to bear some resemblance to the animal's change of motion, as it would be felt by a rider, and as we may suppose it is felt by the animal itself.

Other forms of imitative harmony, and many other examples, besides those referred to at the bottom of the pages, will readily occur to all who are conversant in the writings of the best versifiers, particularly Homer, Virgil, Milton, Lucretius, Spenser, Dryden, Shakspeare, Pope, and Gray.

I must not conclude without remarking, in justice to the Greek and Latin poets, that, from our ignorance of the ancient pronunciation, we are but incompetently skilled in their numbers; and that there may be, and probably are, in Homer and Virgil, many imitative harmonies whereof we are not sensible at all. The *quantity* of Greek and Latin syllables we know well enough; but it is a notorious fact, that in cases innumerable our pronunciation of them is contrary to what we know to be right. Thus, in reading the following line of Horace,

Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetæ,

every body pronounces the first syllable of *volunt* long, and the last short; and yet every body knows, that the first is short, and the last long. All regular hexameters begin with a long syllable; yet how often do the best readers introduce them with a short one!

When we read this line, by which Virgil meant both to describe and to imitate slow motion,

*Et sola in sicca seccum spatiat^r arena,**

we make only five or six of the syllables long; and yet in this line there are no fewer than ten long syllables. Must it not then to a Roman ear have appeared more imitative, than it does to ours?

In each of those admirable hexameters, so descriptive of great size,

*Et magnos membrorum artus, magna ossa, lacertosque.
Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen
ademptum,*

there are eleven long syllables, according to the ancient pronunciation, and only six or seven according to the modern. If, then, there be any natural suitableness in the slow rhythm of these lines, (and Virgil certainly thought there was) must not that have been more observable anciently than it is now?

* Georg. i. 389.

In the English tongue, the foot spondeus, consisting of two long syllables, is not frequent, there being generally one short syllable, or more, for each long syllable. And as our accented or emphatick syllables are all long, and as we give emphasis to the Greek and Latin syllables in the same way almost as to our own, we seldom preserve in our pronunciation the rhythm of the ancient poetry, and are (I think) most apt to lose it in those verses that abound in the spondeus. The dactyl, of one long and two short syllables, is very common in English; and it sometimes happens, though not often, that in pronouncing an hexameter of dactyls we preserve the true rhythm tolerably well. Of such an hexameter I take the rhythm to be the same with the following:

Multitudes rush'd all at once on the plain with a thundering uproar.

And according to this rhythm, nearly, we do in fact pronounce the last line of Homer's celebrated description of Sisyphus.* But this line of Virgil, whose measure and motion are exactly the same, the moderns pronounce differently, at least in the first three feet:

* For the example see next page.

* <i>Αὐτὰρ ἐ-</i>	<i>πύρρα πύ-</i>	<i>δονδε χυ-</i>	<i>λινδέρθ</i>	<i>λακας αἰ-</i>	<i>αἰδής-</i>
Multitudes	rush'd all at	once on the	plain with a	thundering	uproar.
Quadrupes-	dante pu-	trem soni-	tu quatit	ungula	campunt.
Suspici-	unt-ite-	r'atqu'ite-	rum fragor	intonat	ingens.
— — —	— — —	— — —	— — —	— — —	— — —

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.

Of this other line of Virgil, describing loud sound,

Suspiciunt; iterum atque iterum fragor intonat ingens:

the rhythm is still the same, after making the necessary *elisions*; and if the reader pronounce it so, his ear will perhaps inform him, that it is more imitative than he at first imagined.

In the beginning of the Eneid, Eolus, at Juno's desire, sends out his winds to destroy the Trojan fleet. Neptune rebukes them for invading his dominions without his leave; and is just going to denounce a threatening, or inflict a punishment, when he recollects that it was proper to calm his waters before he did any thing else:

Quos ego—sed motos præstat componere fluctus.

The interrupted threat is a dactyl; the remainder of the line goes off in spondees. By this transition from a quick to a slow rhythm, is it not probable, that the poet intended to imitate the change of Neptune's purpose? But this is lost in our pronunciation, though in the ancient I believe it must have been observable. One instance more and I quit the subject.

When Dido, that fatal morning on which she

put a period to her life, saw that Enéas and his Trojans were actually gone, she at first broke forth into frantick denunciations of revenge and ruin; but soon checks herself, as if exhausted by her passion, when she reflects that her ravings were all in vain. "Unhappy Dido! (says she) thy evil destiny is now come upon thee."* This change of her mind from tempest to a momentary calm (for she immediately relapses into vengeance and distraction) is finely imitated in the poet's numbers. The words I have translated from a line of spondees, whose slow and soft motion is a striking contrast to the abrupt and sonorous rapidity of the preceding and following verses. This beauty, too, is in a great measure lost in our pronunciation; for we give only five or six long syllables to a line which really contains eleven. Are these remarks too refined? Those readers will hardly think so, who have studied Virgil's versification, which is artful and apposite to a degree that was never equalled or attempted by any other poet.

* Infelix Dido! nunc te fata impia tangunt. *Æneid.* iv. 596. If we read *facta impia*, with the Medicean Manuscript, the rhythm is still the same, and the sense not materially different: "Unhappy Dido! now are the consequences of thy broken vows come upon thee."

In the course of these observations on the *sound* of poetical language, I am not conscious of having affirmed any thing which does not admit of proof. Some of the proofs, however, I was obliged to leave out; as they would have led me into long disquisitions, relating rather to the peculiarities of Latin and English verse, than to the general characters of the poetick art. These proofs may possibly find a place hereafter in a *treatise of versification and English prosody*, which I began some years ago, but have not yet finished.



AN ESSAY
ON
LAUGHTER
AND
LUDICROUS COMPOSITION.

Written in the year 1764.

Ego vero omni de re facetius puto posse ab homine
non inurbano, quam de ipsis facetiis, disputari.

CICERO.

*nothing so dry as a dis-
tation on Wit (3)*



AN ESSAY
ON
LAUGHTER
AND
LUDICROUS COMPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Introduction. The Subject proposed. Opinions of Philosophers. I. Aristotle. II. Hobbes. III. Hutcheson. IV. Akenside.

OF man, it is observed by Homer, that he is the most wretched, and, by Addison and others, that he is the merriest animal in the whole creation: and both opinions are plausible, and both perhaps may be true. If, from the acuteness and delicacy of his perceptive powers, from his remembrance of the past, and his anticipation of what is to come, from his restless and creative fancy, and from the various sensibilities of his moral nature, man be ex-

posed to many evils, both imaginary and real, from which the brutes are exempted, he does also from the same sources derive innumerable delights, that are far beyond the reach of every other animal. That our preeminence in pleasure should thus in some degree, be counterbalanced by our preeminence in pain, was necessary to exercise our virtue, and wean our hearts from sublunary enjoyment; and that beings thus beset with a multitude of sorrows should be supplied from so many quarters with the means of comfort, is suitable to that benign economy which characterises every operation of nature.

When a brute has gratified those few appetites that minister to the support of the species, and of the individual, he may be said to have attained the summit of happiness, above which a thousand years of prosperity could not raise him a single step. But for man, her favourite child, nature has made a more liberal provision. He, if he have only guarded against the necessities of life, and indulged the animal part of his constitution, has experienced but little of that felicity whereof he is capable. To say nothing at present of his moral and religious gratifications, is he not furnished with faculties that fit him for receiving pleasure from

almost every part of the visible universe? Even to those persons, whose powers of observation are confined within a narrow circle, the exercise of the necessary arts. may open inexhaustible sources of amusement, to alleviate the cares of a solitary and laborious life. Men of more enlarged understanding, and more cultivated taste, are still more plentifully supplied with the means of innocent delight. For such, either from acquired habit, or from innate propensity, is the soul of man, that there is hardly any thing in art or nature from which we may not derive gratification. What is great overpowers with pleasing astonishment; what is little may charm by its nicety of proportion, or beauty of colour; what is diversified, pleases by supplying a series of novelties; what is uniform, by leading us to reflect on the skill displayed in the arrangement of its parts; order and connection gratify our sense of propriety; and certain forms of *irregularity* and *unsuitableness* raise within us that agreeable emotion whereof LAUGHTER is the outward sign.

RISIBILITY, considered as one of the characters that distinguish man from the inferiour animals, and as an instrument of harmless, and even of profitable recreation, to every age, condition, and capacity of human creatures, must

be allowed to be not unworthy of the philosopher's notice. Whatever is peculiar to rational nature, must be an object of some importance to a rational being; and Milton has observed, that

Smiles from reason flow,
To brutes denied: ———

Whatever may be employed as a means of discountenancing vice, folly, or falsehood, is an object of importance to a moral being, and Horace has remarked,

Ridiculum acri
Fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res.*

Let this apology suffice at present for my choice of a subject. Even this apology might have been spared: for nothing is below the attention of philosophy, which the Author of nature has been pleased to establish.

In tracing out the cause of laughter, I mean rather to illustrate than to censure the opinions of those who have already written on the same subject. The investigation has been several times attempted; nor is the cause altogether

* ——— Ridicule shall frequently prevail,
And cut the knot when graver reasons fail.

unknown. Yet notwithstanding former discoveries, the following essay may perhaps be found to contain something new; to throw light on certain points of criticism that have not been much attended to; and even to have some merit (if I execute my purpose) as a familiar example of philosophical induction carried on with a strict regard to fact, and without any previous bias in favour of any theory.

To provoke laughter, is not essential either to wit or to humour. For though that unexpected discovery of resemblance between ideas supposed dissimilar, which is called *wit*, and that comick exhibition of singular characters, sentiments, and imagery, which is denominated *humour*, do frequently raise laughter, they do not raise it always. Addison's poem to sir Godfrey Kneller, in which the British kings are likened to heathen gods, is exquisitely witty, and yet not laughable. Pope's Essay on Man abounds in serious wit; and examples of serious humour are not uncommon in Fielding's history of Parson Adams, and in Addison's account of sir Roger de Coverly. Wit, when the subject is grave, and the allusions sublime, raises admiration instead of laughter: and if the comick singularities of a good man appear in circumstances of real distress, the imitation of those

singularities, in the epick or dramattick comedy, will form a species of humour, which if it should force a smile, will draw forth a tear at the same time. An inquiry, therefore, into the distinguishing characters of wit and humour, has no necessary connection with the present subject. I did, however, once intend to have touched upon them in the conclusion of this discourse: but Dr. Campbell's masterly disquisition concerning that matter, in the first part of his *Philosophy of Rhetorick*, makes it improper for me to attempt it. I was favoured with a perusal of that work in manuscript, when I had finished the three first chapters of this essay for the press; and was agreeably surprised to find my notions, in regard to the cause or object of laughter, so fully warranted by those of my very learned and ingenious friend. And it may not perhaps be improper to inform the publick, that neither did he know of my having undertaken this argument, nor I of his having discussed that subject, till we came mutually to exchange our papers, for the purpose of knowing one another's sentiments in regard to what we had written.

Some authors have treated of ridicule, without marking the distinction between *ridiculous* and *ludicrous* ideas. But I presume the natu-

ral order of proceeding in this inquiry, is to begin with ascertaining the nature of what is *purely ludicrous*. Things *ludicrous* and things *ridiculous* have this in common, that both excite pure laughter, the latter excite laughter mixed with disapprobation or contempt.* My design is, to analyse and explain that quality in things or ideas, which makes them provoke *pure laughter*, and entitles them to the name of *ludicrous* or *laughable*.

When certain objects, qualities, or ideas, occur to our senses, memory, or imagination, we smile or laugh at them, and expect that other men should do the same. To smile on certain occasions, is not less *natural*, than to weep at the sight of distress or cry out when we feel pain.

There are different kinds of laughter. As a boy passing by night through a church yard, sings, or whistles in order to conceal his fear even from himself, so there are men, who, by forcing a smile, endeavour sometimes to hide from others, and from themselves too perhaps, their malevolence or envy. Such laughter is *unnatural*. The sound of it offends the ear; the

* *Ridiculus proprie dicitur qui in rebus turpibus ridetur.*

FESTUS.

features distorted by it seem horrible to the eye. A mixture of hypocrisy, malice, and cruel joy, thus displayed on the countenance, is one of the most hateful sights in nature, and transforms the "human face divine" into the visage of a fiend. Similar to this is the smile of a wicked person pleasing himself with the hope of accomplishing his evil purposes. Milton gives a striking picture of it, in that well known passage:

He ceased; for both seem'd highly pleased, and Death,
Grin'd horrible a ghastly smile, to hear
His famine should be fill'd, and bless'd his maw
Destin'd to that good hour. —

But enough of this. Laughter that makes man a fiend or monster, I have no inclination to analyze. My inquiries are confined to "that species of laughter, which is at once natural and innocent."

Of this there are two sorts. The laughter occasioned by tickling or gladness is different from that which arises on reading the Tale of a Tub. The former may be called *animal* laughter: the latter (if it were lawful to adopt a new word, which has become very common of late) I should term *sentimental*. Smiles admit of similar divisions. Not to mention the scornful, the envious, the malevolent smile, I would only re-

mark, that of the innocent and agreeable smile there are two sorts. The one proceeds from the risible emotion, and has a tendency to break out into laughter. The other is the effect of good humour, complacency, and tender affection. This last sort of smile renders a countenance amiable in the highest degree. Homer ascribes it to Venus, in an epithet,* which Dryden and Pope, after Waller, improperly translated *laughter-loving*; an idea that accords better with the character of a romp or hoyden, than with the goddess of love and beauty.

Animal laughter admits of various degrees; from the gentle impulse excited in a child by moderate joy, to that terrifying and even mortal convulsion, which has been known to accompany an unexpected change of fortune. This passion may, as well as joy and sorrow, be communicated by sympathy;† and I know not whether the entertainment we receive from the playful tricks of kittens and other young animals, may not in part be resolved into something like a fellow feeling of their vivacity. Animal and sentimental laughter are frequently blended; but it is easy to distinguish them.

* Φιλομειδης.

† Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 101.

The former is often excessive; the latter never, unless heightened by the other. The latter is always pleasing, both in itself and in its cause; the former may be painful in both. But their principal difference is this: the one always proceeds from a sentiment or emotion, excited in the mind, in consequence of certain objects or ideas being presented to it, of which emotion we may be conscious even when we suppress laughter; the other arises, not from any sentiment, or perception of ludicrous ideas, but from some bodily feeling, or sudden impulse, on what is called the animal spirits, proceeding, or seeming to proceed, from the operation of causes purely material. The present inquiry regards that species that is here distinguished by the name of *sentimental laughter*.

The pleasing emotion,* arising from the view of ludicrous ideas, is known to every one by experience, but, being a simple feeling, admits not of definition. It is to be distinguished from the laughter that generally attends it, as sorrow is to be distinguished from tears; for it is often felt in a high degree by those who

* This emotion I sometimes call the *risible emotion*, and sometimes the *ludicrous sentiment*; terms that may be sufficiently intelligible, though perhaps they are not according to strict analogy.

are remarkable for gravity of countenance. Swift, seldom laughed, notwithstanding his uncommon talents in wit and humour, and the extraordinary delight he seems to have had in surveying the ridiculous side of things. Why this agreeable emotion should be accompanied with laughter as its outward sign, or sorrow express itself by tears, or fear by trembling and paleness, I cannot ultimately explain, otherwise than by saying, that such is the appointment of the Author of nature. All I mean by this inquiry is, to determine, *what is peculiar to those things which provoke laughter; or, rather, which raise in the mind that pleasing sentiment or emotion whereof laughter is the external sign.*

I. Philosophers have differed in their opinions concerning this matter. Aristotle, in the fifth chapter of his Poeticks, observes of comedy, that "it imitates those vices or meannesses only which partake of the ridiculous: now the ridiculous (says he) consists in some fault or turpitude not attended with great pain, and not destructive." It is clear, that Aristotle here means to characterise, not laughable qualities in general, (as some have thought) but the objects of comick ridicule only; and in this view the definition is just, however, it may have been overlooked or despised by comick writers. Crimes

and misfortunes are often in modern plays, and were sometimes in the ancient, held up as objects of publick merriment; but if poets had that reverence for nature which they ought to have, they would not shock the common sense of mankind by so absurd a representation. I wish our writers of comedy and romance would in this respect imitate the delicacy of their ancestors, the honest and brave savages of old Germany, of whom the historian says, "Nemo
" vitia ridet; nec corrumpere et corrumpi secu-
" lum vocatur."* The definition from Aristotle does not, however, suit the general nature of ludicrous ideas; for it will appear by and by, that men laugh at that in which there is neither fault nor turpitude of any kind.

II. The theory of Mr. Hobbes would hardly have deserved notice, if Addison had not spoken of it with approbation in the forty-seventh paper of the *Spectator*. "The passion of laughter (says
" Mr. Hobbes) is nothing else, but sudden glory
" arising from some sudden conception of some
" eminency in ourselves by comparison with
" the infirmity of others, or with our own for-
" merly. For men (continues he) laugh at the
" follies of themselves past, when they come

* Tacitus, de moribus Germanorum, cap. 19.

“ suddenly to remembrance, except they bring
“ with them any present dishonour.” Addison
justly observes, after quoting these words, that
“ according to this account, when we hear a
“ man laugh excessively, instead of saying that he
“ is very merry, we ought to tell him that he is
“ very proud.” It is strange, that the elegant
author should be aware of this consequence, and
yet admit the theory; for so good a judge of hu-
man nature could not be ignorant, that laughter
is not considered as a sign of pride; persons of
singular gravity being often suspected of that
vice, but great laughers seldom or never.
When we see a man attentive to the innocent
humours of a merry company, and yet maintain
a fixed solemnity of countenance, is it natural
for us to think, that he is the humblest, and the
only humble person, in the circle?

Another writer in the *Spectator*, No. 249.
remarks, in confirmation of this theory, that
the *vainest* part of mankind are most addicted
to the passion of laughter. Now, how can this
be, if the *proudest* part of mankind are also most
addicted to it, unless we suppose vanity and
pride to be the same thing? But they are cer-
tainly different passions. The proud man de-
spises other men, and derives his chief pleasure
from the contemplation of his own importance:

the vain man stands in need of the applause of others, and cannot be happy without it. Pride is apt to be reserved and sullen; vanity is often affable, and officiously obliging. The proud man is so confident of his merit, and thinks it so obvious to all the world, that he will scarce give himself the trouble to inform you of it: the vain man, to raise your admiration, scruples not to tell you, not only the whole truth, but even a great deal more. In the same person these two passions may, no doubt, be united: but some men are too proud to be vain, and some vain men are too conscious of their own weaknes to be proud. Be all this, however, as it will, we have not as yet made any discovery of the cause of laughter; in regard to which, I apprehend that the vain are not more intemperate than other people; and I am sure that the proud are much more so.

The instances brought by Addison, in favour of this theory of Mr. Hobbes; of “great men
“formerly keeping in their retinue a person to
“laugh at, who was by profession a fool; of
“Dutchmen being diverted with the sign of the
“gaper; of the mob entertaining themselves
“with jackpuddings, whose humour lies in
“committing blunders; and of the amusement
“that some people find in making as many

“Aprilfools as possible:”* these instances, I say, may prove the truth of the distich, quoted by our author from Dennis, who translates it from Boileau,

Thus one fool lolls his tongue out at another,
And shakes his empty noddle at his brother.

But I cannot see how they should prove, that laughter is owing to pride, or to a sense of our superiority over the ludicrous object. Great men are as merry now when they do not keep professed jesters, as they were formerly when they did. The gaper may be a common sign at Amsterdam, as the Saracen's head is in England, without being the standing jest of the country, or indeed any jest at all. The jackpudding is considered, even by the mob, as more rogue than fool; and they who attend the stage of the itinerant physician, do for the most part regard both the master and the servant as persons of extraordinary abilities. And as to the wag who amuses himself on the first of April with telling lies, he must be shallow indeed, if he hope by so doing to acquire any superiority over another man, whom he knows to be wiser and better than himself; for on these occasions, the

* See Spectator, Numb. 47.

greatness of the joke, and the loudness of the laugh, are, if I rightly remember, in exact proportion to the sagacity of the person imposed on. What our author, in the same paper, says of buts in conversation, makes rather against his theory than for it. No man, who has any pretensions to good manners, to common understanding, or even to common humanity, will ever think of making a but of that person who has neither sense nor spirit to defend himself. Sir John Falstaff would not have excelled so much in this character, if he had not equally excelled in warding off and retorting raillery. The truth is, the but of the company is generally known to be one of the wittiest and best humoured persons in it; so that the mirth he may diffuse around him cannot be supposed to arise from his apparent inferiority.

If laughter arose from pride, and that pride from a sudden conception of some present eminency in ourselves, compared with others, or compared with ourselves as we were formerly; it would follow, that the wise, the beautiful, the strong, the healthy, and the rich, must giggle away a great part of their lives, because they would every now and then become suddenly sensible of their superiority over the foolish, the homely, the feeble, the sickly, and

the poor; that one would never recollect the transactions of one's childhood, or the absurdity of one's dreams, without merriment; that in the company of our equals we should always be grave; and that sir Isaac Newton must have been the greatest wag of his time.

That the passion of laughter, though not properly the effect of pride, does however, arise from a conception of some small fault or turpitude, or at least from some fancied inferiority, in the ludicrous object, has been asserted by several writers. One would indeed be apt at first hearing to reply, that we often smile at a witty performance or passage, such as Butler's allusion to a boiled lobster, in his picture of the morning,* when we are so far from conceiving any inferiority or turpitude in the author, that we greatly admire his genius, and wish ourselves possessed of that very turn of fancy which produced the drollery in question. "But
" as we may be betrayed into a momentary belief, that Garrick is really Abel Drugger; so
" it is said, we may imagine a transient inferiority, either real or assumed, even in a per-

* The sun had long since in the lap
Of Thetis taken out his nap,
And like a lobster boil'd, the morn
From black to red began to turn.

“son whom we admire; and that, when we
“smile at Butler’s allusion, we for a moment
“conceive him to have assumed the character
“of one who was incapable to discern the im-
“propriety of such an odd union of images.
“We smile at the logick, wherewith Hudibras
“endeavours to solace himself, when he is set
“in the stocks,

As beards, the nearer that they tend
To th’ earth, grow still more reverend;
And cannons shoot the higher pitches,
The lower you let down their breeches,
I’ll make this present abject state
Advance me to a greater height.

“Here, it is said, that the laugh arises from
“our supposing the author to assume for a
“moment the character of one who, from his
“ignorance of the nature of things, and of the
“rules of analogical reasoning, does not per-
“ceive, that the case he argues *from* is totally
“unlike the case he argues *to*, nor, conse-
“quently, that the argument is a sophism. If
“we smile at the ass, in the fable, fawning
“upon his master, in imitation of the spaniel;
“or at the frog puffing and swelling to stretch
“himself to the size of the ox, it is (we are told)
“because we perceive something singularly
“defective in the passions or sentiment of those

“ animals. And a respectable friend, who entertains us with a merry story, is said to do so, either by assuming a momentary inferiority, or by leading our thoughts to some thing in which we seem to discern some small fault or turpitude.” In proof of this, it is further affirmed, “ That we never smile at *fortuitous* combinations of ideas, qualities, or events, but at those combinations only that seem to require the agency of some directing mind: whence it is inferred, that wherever the ludicrous quality appears, a certain mental character is supposed to exert itself; and that this character must needs imply inferiority, because, from our being so often tempted to smile by the tricks of buffoons and brute animals, it would seem to be consistent neither with superiority nor with equality.”

This theory is more subtile than solid. Let us look back to the analogical argument which Butler puts in the mouth of his hero, and which every person who has the feelings of a man must allow to be laughable. Why is it so? Because (say they) it leads us to discover some turpitude or deficiency in the author's understanding. Is this deficiency, then, in the hero Hudibras, or in Butler the poet? Is it real, or is it assumed? It matters not which; for, though

we knew that an idiot had accidentally written it, or that a wrongheaded enthusiast had seriously spoken it, the reasoning would still be ludicrous. Is then a trifling argument from analogy a laughable object, whether advanced seriously or in jest? If this be the case, it must be owned, that the sentiments of mortal men are strangely perverted in these latter times; for that many a volume of elaborate controversy, instead of disposing the gentle reader to slumber by its darkness and dulness, ought to have "set the table in a roar" by its vain and sophistical analogies.

Further, I deny not, that all performances in wit and humour are connected with a mind, and lead our thoughts to the performer as naturally as any other effect to its cause. But do we not sometimes laugh at fortuitous combinations, in which, as no mental energy is concerned in producing them, there cannot be either fault or turpitude? Could not one imagine a set of people, jumbled together by accident, so as to present a laughable group to those who know their characters? If Pope and Colley Cibber had been so squeezed by a crowd in the playhouse, as to be compelled to sit with their heads contiguous, and the arm of one about the neck of the other, expressing at the

same time in their looks a mutual antipathy and reluctance, I believe the sight would have been entertaining enough, especially if believed to be accidental. Our coffeehouse politicians were lately betrayed into a smile, by one Papi-rius Cursor, a wag who read the newspapers quite across the page, without minding the space that distinguishes the columns, and so pretended to light upon some very amusing combinations. These were no doubt the contrivance of Papirius himself; but, supposing them to have been accidental, and that the printer had without design neglected to separate his columns, I ask whether they would have been less ridiculous? The joke I shall allow to be as wretched as you please: but we are not now talking of the *delicacies* of wit or humour, (which will be touched upon in the sequel) but of those combinations of ideas that provoke laughter. And here let me beg of the critick, not to take offence at the familiarity of these examples. I shall apologise for them afterwards. Meantime he will be pleased to consider, that my subject is a familiar one, and the phenomenon I would account for as frequent among clowns and children as among philosophers.

III. Hutcheson has given another account of the ludicrous quality. He seems to think,

that, "it is the contrast or opposition of dignity and meanness that occasions laughter." Granting this to be true, (and how far this is true will appear by and by) I would observe, in the first place, what the ingenious author seems to have been aware of, that there may be a mixture of meanness and dignity, where there is nothing ludicrous. A city, considered as a collection of low and lofty houses, is no laughable object. Nor was that personage either ludicrous or ridiculous, whom Pope so justly characterises,

The greatest, wisest, meanest, of mankind.

But, secondly, cases might be mentioned, of laughter arising from a group of ideas or objects, where there is no discernible opposition of meanness and dignity. We are told of the dagger of Hudibras, that

It could scrape trenchers, or chip bread,
Toast cheese or bacon, though it were
To bait a mouse trap, 'twould not care;
'Twould make clean shoes, or in the earth
Set leeks and onions, and so forth.

The humour of the passage cannot arise from the meanness of these offices compared with the dignity of the dagger, nor from any

opposition of meanness and dignity in the offices themselves, they being all equally mean; and must therefore be owing to some other peculiarity in the description. We laugh, when a droll mimicks the solemnity of a grave person; here dignity and meanness are indeed united: but we laugh also (though not so heartily perhaps) when he mimicks the peculiarities of a fellow as insignificant as himself, and displays no opposition of dignity and meanness. The levities of Sancho Pancha opposed to the solemnity of his master, and compared with his own schemes of preferment, form an entertaining contrast: but some of the vagaries of that renowned squire are truly laughable, even when his preferment and his master are out of the question. We do not perceive any contrast of meanness and dignity in mistress Quickly, sir Toby in *Twelfth Night*, the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, or Autolycus in the *Winter's Tale*; yet they are all ludicrous characters. Dr. Harrison in Fielding's *Amelia* is never mean, but always respectable; yet there is a dash of humour in him, which often betrays the reader into a smile. Men laugh at puns; the wisest and wittiest of our species have laughed at them; queen Elizabeth, Cicero, and Shakspeare, laughed at them; clowns and children laugh

at them; and most men, at one time or other, are inclined to do the same: but in this sort of low wit, is it an opposition of meanness and dignity that entertains us? Is it not rather a mixture of sameness and diversity; sameness in the sound, and diversity in the signification?

IV. Akenside, in the third book of his excellent poem, treats of ridicule at considerable length. He gives a detail of ridiculous characters; ignorant pretenders to learning, boastful soldiers, and lying travellers, hypocritical churchmen, conceited politicians, old women that talk of their charms and virtue, ragged philosophers who rail at riches, *virtuosi* intent upon trifles, romantick lovers, wits wantonly satirical, fops that out of vanity affect to be diseased and profligate, dastards who are ashamed or afraid without reason, and fools who are ignorant of what they ought to know. These characters may no doubt be set in such a light as to move at once our *laughter* and *contempt*, and are therefore truly *ridiculous*, and fit objects of comick satire: but the author does not distinguish between what is *laughable* in them and what is *contemptible*; so that we have no reason to think, that he meant to specify the qualities peculiar to those things that provoke *pure laughter*. Having finished the detail of characters,

he makes some general remarks on the cause of ridicule; and explains himself more fully in a prose definition illustrated by examples. The definition, or rather description, is in these words. "That which makes objects ridiculous, "is some ground of admiration or esteem "connected with other more general circum- "stances comparatively worthless or deformed; "or it is some circumstance of turpitude or "deformity connected with what is in general "excellent or beautiful: the inconsistent pro- "perties existing either in the objects them- "selves, or in the apprehension of the person "to whom they relate; belonging always to the "same order or class of being; implying senti- "ment and design; and exciting no acute or "vehement emotion of the heart." Whatever account we make of this definition, which to those who acquiesce in the foregoing reasonings may perhaps appear not quite satisfactory, there is in the poem a passage that deserves particular notice, as it seems to contain a more exact account of the ludicrous quality, than is to be found in any of the theories above mentioned. This passage will be quoted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

Laughter seems to arise from the View of Things incongruous united in the same Assemblage; I. By Juxtaposition; II. As Cause and Effect; III. By Comparison founded on Similitude; or, IV. United so as to exhibit an Opposition of Meanness and Dignity.

HOWEVER imperfect these theories may appear, there is none of them destitute of merit: and indeed the most fanciful philosopher seldom frames a theory, without consulting nature, in some of her most obvious appearances. Laughter very frequently arises from the view of dignity and meanness united in the same object; sometimes no doubt, from the appearance of assumed inferiority,* as well as of small

* Pope, Arbuthnot, and Swift, in some of their most humorous pieces, assume the character, and affect the ignorance, of Grubstreet writers; and from this circumstance part of the humour of such papers will perhaps be found to arise. “Valde hæc ridentur (says Cicero) “quæ a prudentibus, quasi per dissimulationem non “intelligendi, subabsurde falseque dicuntur.” De Orat. II. 68.

faults and unimportant turpitudes; and sometimes, perhaps, though rarely, from that sort of pride, which is described in the passage quoted from Mr. Hobbes by Addison.

All these accounts agree in this, that the cause of laughter is something compounded; or something that disposes the mind to form a comparison, by passing from one object or idea to another. That this is in fact the case, cannot be proved *a priori*; but this holds in all the examples hitherto given, and will be found to hold in all that are given hereafter. May it not then be laid down as a principle, that "laughter arises from the view of two or more objects or ideas, disposing the mind to form a comparison?" According to the theory of Hobbes, this comparison would be between the ludicrous object and ourselves; according to those writers who misapply Aristotle's definition, it would seem to be formed between the ludicrous object and other things or persons in general; and if we incline to Hutcheson's theory, which is the best of the three, we shall think that there is a comparison of the parts of the ludicrous object, first with one another, and secondly with ideas or things extraneous.

Further: Every appearance that is made up of parts, or that leads the mind of the beholder

to form a comparison, is not ludicrous. The body of a man or woman, of a horse, a fish, or a bird, is not ludicrous, though it consists of many parts; and it may be compared to many other things without raising laughter: but the picture described in the beginning of the epistle to the Pisces, with a man's head, a horse's neck, feathers of different birds, limbs of different beasts, and the tail of a fish, would have been thought ludicrous eighteen hundred years ago, if we believe Horace, and in certain circumstances would no doubt be so at this day. It would seem then, that "the parts of a laughable assemblage must be in some degree unsuitable and heterogeneous."

Moreover: Any one of the parts of the Horatian monster, a human head, a horse's neck, the tail of a fish, or the plumage of a fowl, is not ludicrous in itself; nor would those several parts be ludicrous, if attended to in succession, without any view to their union. For to see them disposed on different shelves of a museum, or even on the same shelf, nobody would laugh; except perhaps the thought of uniting them were to occur to his fancy, or the passage of Horace to his memory. It seems to follow, "that the incongruous parts of a laughable idea or object must either be combined so as to form an as-

“semblage, or must be supposed to be so combined.”

May we not then conclude, that “laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them?” The lines from Akenside, formerly referred to, seem to point at the same doctrine:

Where'er the power of Ridicule displays
Her quainteyed visage, *some incongruous form,*
Some stubborn dissonance of things combined,
Strikes on the quick observer.

And, to the same purpose, the learned and ingenious Dr. Gerard, in his *Essay on Taste*: “The sense of ridicule is gratified by an inconsistency and dissonance of circumstances in the same object, or in objects nearly related in the main; or by a similitude or relation unexpected between things on the whole opposite and unlike.”

And therefore, instead of saying with Hutcheson, that the cause or object of laughter is an “opposition of dignity and meanness,” I would say, in more general terms, that it is, “an oppo-

“sition of suitableness and unsuitableness, or of
“relation and the want of relation, united, or
“supposed to be united, in the same assem-
“blage.” Thus the offices ascribed to the dagger of Hudibras seem quite heterogeneous; but we discover a bond of connection among them, when we are told, that the same weapon could occasionally perform them all. Thus, even in that mimicry, which displays no opposition of dignity and meanness, we perceive the actions of one man joined to the features and body of another; that is, a mixture of unsuitableness, a want of relation, arising from the difference of persons, with congruity and similitude, arising from the sameness of the actions. Thus, at first view, the dawn of the morning, and a boiled lobster, seem utterly incongruous, unlike, and (as Biondello says of Petruchio’s stirrups) “of no
“kindred;” but when a change of colour from black to red is suggested, we recognize a likeness, and consequently a relation, or ground of comparison.

And here let it be observed in general, that, the greater the number of incongruities that are blended in the same assemblage, the more ludicrous it will probably be. If, as in the last example, there be an opposition of dignity and meanness, as well as of likeness and dissimili-

tude, the effect of the contrast will be more powerful, than if only one of these oppositions had appeared in the ludicrous idea. The sublimity of Don Quixote's mind contrasted and connected with his miserable equipage, forms a very comical exhibition; but when all this is still further connected and contrasted with Sancho Pancha, the ridicule is heightened exceedingly. Had the knight of the lions been better mounted and accoutred, he would not have made us smile so often; because the hero's mind and circumstances being more adequately matched, the whole group would have united fewer inconsistencies, and reconciled fewer incongruities. No particular in this equipment is without its use. The ass of Sancho, and the horse of his master; the knight tall and rawboned, the squire fat and short; the one brave, solemn, generous, learned, and courteous, the other not less remarkable for cowardice, levity, selfishness, ignorance, and rusticity; the one absurdly enamoured of an ideal mistress, the other ridiculously fond of his ass; the one devoted to glory, the other enslaved to his belly: it is not easy out of two persons, to make up a more multifarious contrast. Butler has however combined a still greater variety of uncouth and jarring circumstances in Ralpho and Hudibras: but the picture, though more

elaborate, is less natural. Yet this argues no defect of judgment. His design was, to make his hero not only ludicrous, but contemptible; and therefore he jumbles together, in his equipage and person, a number of mean and disgusting qualities, pedantry, ignorance, nastiness, and extreme deformity. But the knight of La Mancha, though a ludicrous, was never intended for a contemptible personage. He often moves our pity, he never forfeits our esteem; and his adventures and sentiments are generally interesting, which could not have been the case, if his story had not been natural, and himself endowed with great as well as good qualities. To have given him such a shape, and such weapons, arguments, boots, and breeches, as Butler has bestowed on his champion, would have destroyed that solemnity, which is so striking a feature in Don Quixote: and Hudibras, with the manners and person of the Spanish hero, would not have been that paltry figure, which the English poet meant to hold up to the laughter and contempt of his countrymen. Sir Launcelot Greaves is of Don Quixote's kindred, but a different character. Smollet's design was, not to expose him to ridicule, but rather to recommend him to our pity and admiration. He has therefore given him youth, strength, and beauty, as well as courage,

and dignity of mind, has mounted him on a generous steed, and arrayed him in an elegant suit of armour. Yet that the history might have a comick air, he has been careful to contrast and connect sir Launcelot with a squire and other associates of very dissimilar tempers and circumstances.

What has been said of the cause of laughter does not amount to an exact description, far less to a logical definition: there being innumerable combinations of congruity and inconsistency, of relation and contrariety, of likeness and dissimilitude, which are not ludicrous at all. If we could ascertain the peculiarities of these, we should be able to characterise with more accuracy the general nature of ludicrous combination. But before we proceed to this, it would be proper to evince, that of the present theory thus much at least is true, that though every incongruous combination is not ludicrous, every ludicrous combination is incongruous.

It is only by a detail of facts or examples, that any theory of this sort can be either established or overthrown. By such a detail the foregoing theories have been, or may be, shown to be illfounded, or not sufficiently comprehensive. A single instance of a laughable object, which neither unites, nor is supposed to unite

incongruous ideas, would likewise show the insufficiency of the present: nor will I undertake to prove, (for indeed I cannot) that no such instance can be given. A complete enumeration of ludicrous objects it would be vain to attempt: and therefore we can never hope to ascertain, beyond the possibility of doubt, that common quality which belongs to all ludicrous ideas that are, or have been, or may be imagined. All that can be done in a case of this kind is to prove, by a variety of examples, that the theory now proposed is more comprehensive, and better founded, than any of the foregoing.

Many are the modes of combination by which incongruous qualities may be presented to the eye, or to the fancy, so as to provoke laughter: and of incongruity itself, as of falsehood, the forms may be diversified without end. An *exact arrangement* of ludicrous examples is therefore as unattainable as a *complete enumeration*. Something, however, of this sort we must attempt, to avoid running into confusion.

I. One of the simplest modes of combination, is that which arises from *contiguity*. Things incongruous are often laughable, when united as parts of a system, or simply *when placed together*. That dialogue of Erasmus, called *absurda*, which looks like a conversation between two deaf men,

seems to be an attempt to raise laughter, by the mere juxtaposition of unconnected sentences. But the attempt is rather unsuccessful; this sort of cross purposes being too obvious, and too little surprising, to yield entertainment.

1. Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, all admit, that bodily singularities may be laughable;* and, according to the first of these authors, that is a ridiculous countenance, in which there is deformity and distortion without distress. Any feature, particularly one of the middle features, a nose, a mouth, or a chin, uncommonly large, may, when attended with no inconvenience, tempt one to smile; as appears from the effect of caricatura in painting. We read in the Spectator,† of a number of men with long chins, whom a wag at Bath invited to dine with him; and are told, that a great deal of mirth passed on the occasion. Here was a collection of incongruities related not only by mutual similitude, but also by juxtaposition; a circumstance that would naturally heighten the ludicrous effect. Yet here was no mixture of dignity and meanness; and the meet-

* Arist. Poet. § 5.; Cicero de Orat. ii. 239.; Quint. Inst. Or. vi. 3.

† Number 371.

ing, if it had been accidental, would not have been less laughable.

2. A country dance of men and women, like those exhibited by Hogarth in his *Analysis of Beauty*, could hardly fail to make a beholder merry, whether he believed their union to be the effect of design or of accident. Most of those persons have incongruities of their own, in their shape, dress, or attitude, and all of them are incongruous in respect of one another; thus far the assemblage displays contrariety or want of relation: and they are all united in the same place, and in the same dance; and thus far they are mutually related. And if we suppose the two elegant figures removed, which might be done without lessening the ridicule, we should not easily discern any contrast of dignity and meanness in the group that remains.

3. Almost the same remarks might be made on *The enraged Musician*, another piece of the same great master, of which a witty author quaintly says, that it *deafens* one to look at it. This extraordinary group forms a very comical mixture of incongruity and relation; of incongruity, owing to the dissimilar employments and appearances of the several persons, and to the variety and dissonance of their respective noises; and of relation, owing to their being all united in

the same place, and for the same purpose, of tormenting the poor fiddler. From the various sounds cooperating to this one end, the piece becomes more laughable, than if their meeting were conceived to be without any particular destination; for the greater the number of relations, as well as of contrarieties, that take place in any ludicrous assemblage, the more ludicrous it will generally appear. Yet though this group comprehends not any mixture of meanness and dignity, it would, I think, be allowed to be laughable to a certain degree, merely from the juxtaposition of the objects, even though it were supposed to be accidental.

Groups of this sort, if accurately described, are no doubt entertaining, when expressed in words, as well as when presented to the eye by means of colour. But it would require many words to do justice to so great a variety of things and persons; which therefore could not be apprehended by the mind, but gradually and in succession; and hence the jarring coincidences of the whole would be less discernible in a poetical description, than in a print or picture. The ludicrous effect, that arises from the mere *contiguity* of the objects, may therefore be better exemplified by visible assemblages delineated by the painter, than by such as are conveyed to the

mind by verbal description.* Yet even by this vehicle, burlesque combinations may be suggested to the fancy, which in part derive the ludicrous character from the *juxtaposition* of the component parts. Take an example or two.

* But it does not follow, that painting is a more copious source of risible emotion, than those arts are which affect the mind by means of language. Painting is no doubt more lively in description than poetry: and, by presenting a whole composition to the eye at once, may strike the mind with a more diversified and more emphatical impulse. What we see, too, we apprehend more easily than what we only conceive from narration:

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.

But the descriptive powers of painting are subject to many limitations. It cannot mark the progress of action or thought, because it exhibits the events of one instant of time; nor has it any expression for intellectual notions nor for those calmer affections of the soul that produce no visible change on the body. But poetry can describe every energy of mind, and phenomenon of matter; and every variety, however minute, of character, sentiment, and passion, as it appears in each period of its progress. And innumerable combinations, both of sublime and of ludicrous ideas there are, which the pencil cannot trace out, but which are easily conveyed to the mind by speech or writing.

4. "If a man (says the *Tatler*, speaking of "the utility of advertisements) has pains in his "head, colicks in his bowels, or spots in his "clothes, he may there meet with proper cures "and remedies. If a man would recover a wife, "or a horse that is stolen or strayed; if he wants "new sermons, electuaries, or asses milk, or "any thing else, either for his body or his mind, "this is the place to look for them in.*

5. He sung of Taffy Welch and Sawney Scot,
Lillibullero, and the Irish trot;
The bower of Rosamond, and Robin Hood,
And how the grass now grows where Troy town stood;
Then he was seiz'd with a religious qualm,
And on a sudden sung the hundredth psalm.†

6. Incongruous ideas, related by contiguity, do sometimes acquire a closer connection, and may become more laughable, when their names being made equally dependent upon one and the same verb, confer on it two or more incongruous significations.

"It is observable, (says Pope of prince Eugene) that this general is a great taker of "snuff, as well as of towns."‡

* *Tatler*, Numb. 224

† *Gay's Pastorals*. See *Rape of the Lock*, ii. 105—110.

‡ *Key to the Lock*. In all wit of this sort, when laughter is intended, it will perhaps be necessary to blend great-

An opposition of dignity and meanness, or of greatness and littleness, is no doubt observable in these examples. Yet description may sometimes be laughable, when the ideas or phrases are related by juxtaposition only, and imply no perceptible contrast of dignity and meanness. Swift's inventory of his household stuff, "An oaken broken elbowchair, " A caudlecup without an ear," &c. is truly laughable; at least we

ness with littleness, or to form some other glaring contrast. Ovid and Cowley are fond of these quaint conceits, but seldom raise a smile by them, and surely did not intend any.

Consiliis non curribus utere nostris. *Metamorph. lib. 2.*

And not my chariot, but my counsel take. *Addison.*

But now the early birds began to call

The morning forth: uprose the Sun and Saul.

Davidicis.

"A horse (says a certain serious, but flowery author) may throw his rider, and at once dash his body against the stones, and soul into the other world."

Such witticism in a serious work is offensive to a reader of taste, (see Hurd's Commentary on the Epistle to Augustus, vers. 97.) and we are not apt to laugh at that which offends us. To the author it is probably the object of admiration, and we seldom laugh at what we greatly admire.

And thus abound in
Society —

are sure that he thought it so: the *various* and *dissimilar* articles specified in it are *similar* and *uniform* in this one respect, that they are all worn out, imperfect, or useless; but their meanness is without any mixture of dignity. Sancho's proverbs often provoke a smile; not because some are low and others elevated, but because, though *unconnected* both with the subject and with one another, they happen to be spoken *at the same time*, and absurdly applied to the same purpose. I have heard that mirth may be promoted amongst idle people by the following expedient. On the top of a page of paper, one of the company writes a line which he covers with a book; another adds a second, and conceals it in the same manner; and thus the paper goes from hand to hand, till it be full, nobody knowing what the others have written: then the covering is taken off, and the whole read over, as if it were a continued discourse. Here the principal bond of union is juxtaposition; and yet, though united by this alone, and though accidentally united, the incongruities may be laughable; though no doubt the joke would be heightened, if there should also happen to be a mixture of meanness and dignity. And the same thing will be found to hold true of those musical contrivances called *medleys*.

7. Even when art is not used to disunite them,

human thoughts under no restraint are apt to become ridiculously wild and incongruous. When his mind unbends itself into a reverie, and, without attending to any particular object, permits the ideas to appear and glide away according to the caprice of undirected fancy, the gravest philosopher would be shy of giving permanence to such a jumble by speech or writing;* lest by its odd incongruities it should raise a laugh at his expense, and show that his thoughts were not quite so regular as he wished the world to believe. We need not then wonder, that, when persons of light minds are made to *think aloud* upon the stage, their rhapsodies should prove so entertaining. Juliet's nurse and Mrs. Quickly, are characters of this sort. And we meet with many such in real life; whose ravings are laughable, even when they exhibit no mixture of meanness and dignity, and when mere *juxtaposition* is the chief bond of union among their ideas.

II. The mind naturally considers as part of the same assemblage, and joins together in one view, those objects that appear in the relation of *cause and effect*. Hence when things, in other respects *unrelated* or *incongruous*, are found or

* See the *Spectator*, Numb. 225.

supposed to be *thus related*, they sometimes provoke laughter.

1. "Really, madam, (says Filch in the *Beggar's Opera*) I fear I shall be cut off in the flower of my youth; so that every now and then since I was *sumpt*, I have thoughts of taking up and going to sea." It is the cause of this resolution that makes it ludicrous. One sort of water suggests another to the thief's fancy; and the fresh water pump puts him in mind of a similar implement belonging to ships. There is something unexpected, and incongruous in the thought, and at the same time an appearance of natural connection.

2. There is a sort of ironical reasoning, not easily described, which would seem to derive the ludicrous character from a surprising mixture of plausibility and absurdity: and which, on account of the real disagreement, though seeming affinity, of the conclusion considered as the *effect*, with the premises considered as the *cause*, may not improperly be referred to this head; though perhaps, from the real *dissimilitude*, and unexpected appearance of *likeness*, in the circumstances whereon the argument is founded, it might with equal propriety be referred to the following. Several humorous examples of this kind of sophistry may be seen in that excellent

English balled called *The Tiptling Philosophers*. Hudibras also abounds in it. Such are the lines already quoted, in which he draws comfort from the disaster of being set in the stocks; and such are those well known passages, that prove morality to be a crime, and honour to lodge in that part of the human body where it is most liable to be wounded by a kick.*

3. A cause and effect extremely inadequate to each other form a ludicrous combination. We smile at the child (in *Quarles's Emblems*) attempting to blow out the sun with a pair of bellows. Nor is it much less ridiculous to see heroes, in a tragedy or opera, breathing their last in a longwinded similitude, or musical cadence. The tailor of Laputa, taking measure for a suit of clothes with a quadrant; the wise men of Lagado carrying vast loads of *things* about with them, that they might converse together without impairing their lungs by the use of speech; and several of the other projects recorded in the same admirable satire,† are ludicrous in the highest degree, from the utter disproportion of the effect to the cause. The same remark may

* See Hudibras, part 2. canto 3. vers. 1065; and part 3. canto 1. vers. 1290.

† Gulliver's voyage to Laputa.

be made upon that part of sir John Enville's complaint, where he says (speaking of his lady) "She dictates to me in my own business, sets me right in point of trade; and, if I disagree with her about any of my ships at sea, wonders that I will dispute with her, when I know very well that her great grandfather was a flag-officer."* Violent anger occasioned by slight injury makes a man ridiculous; we *despise* his levity, and *laugh* at his absurdity. All excessive passion, when it awakens not sympathy, is apt to provoke laughter; nor do we heartily sympathize with any malevolent, nor indeed with any violent emotions, till we know their cause, or have reason to think them well founded. With such as we have no experience of, we rarely sympathize; and the view of them in others, especially when immoderate, gives rise to merriment. The distress of the miser when his hoard is stolen, and the transport wherewith he receives it back, though the most intense feelings of which he is capable, are more apt to move our laughter, than our sorrow or joy: and in the *Aulularia* of Plautus, a great deal of comick ridicule is founded on this circumstance. Ranting in tragedy is laughable, because we know the cause

* Spectator, Numb. 299.

to be inadequate to the effect; and because a distorted imitation of nature implies a contrast of likeness and dissimilitude: but the opposite fault of insipidity, either in acting or in writing, unless accompanied with something peculiarly absurd, is not laughable; because it does not rouse the attention, and has not that *uncommonness*, which (as will be shown hereafter) generally belongs to ludicrous combination. This difference in the effects of theatrical impropriety is hinted at by Horace;

— Male si mandata loqueris,
Aut dormitabo, aut ridebo.*—

Immoderate fear in another, when there seems to be no sufficient cause for it, and when we ourselves are at ease; like that of sir Hugh Evans, when he is going to fight the French doctor, is highly ridiculous; both because it is excessive, and because it produces a conflict of discordant passions, and an unconnected effusion of words.†

* Ar. Poet. vers. 105.

† “ Pless my soul! how full of cholers I am, and tremp-
“ ling of mind! I shall be glad if he have deceived me.
“ How melancholies I am? I will knog his urinals about
“ his knave’s costard, when I have good opportunities
“ for the orke. Pless my soul! *To shallow rivers, to*

4. An emotion that ought to be important venting itself in frivolous language, or insipid behaviour, would no doubt make us smile, if it did not occasion disappointment, or some other powerful feeling subversive of laughter. When Blackmore, in his paraphrases of holy writ, shows, by the meanness of his words and figures, that instead of having an adequate sense of the dignity of the subject, his mind was wandering after the most paltry conceits, our laughter is prevented by our indignation. Or if ever we are betrayed into a smile by such a couplet as the following,

On thee, O Jacob, I thy jealous God
Vast heaps of heavy mischief will unload. —*

it must be in some unguarded moment, when, our disgust being less keen than it ought to be, the ludicrous emotion is permitted to operate.

5. Every body knows, that hyperbole is a source of the sublime; and it is equally true, that amplification is a source of humour. But as that which is intrinsically mean cannot be made great, so neither can real excellence be

*"whose falls Melodious birds sing madrigals; (singing)—
"To shallow—Mercy on me! I have a great disposition
"to cry. When as I sate in Pabilon," &c.*

Merry Wives of Windsor, act 3. sc. 1

* Blackmore's song of Moses.

rendered laughable, by mere amplification. A coxcomb, by exaggerating the charms of a beautiful woman, may make himself ridiculous, but will hardly make them so. But a deformity of feature, that is ludicrous in a low degree, may by exaggeration be made more ludicrous: witness Falstaff's account of Bardolph's fiery coloured face.* The following is a Grecian conceit; and so highly valued by Strada, that he takes the trouble to explain it in a copious paraphrase.

In vain to wipe his nose old Plocus tries;
That mass his most expansive grasp defies:
Sneezing he says not, " Bless me;" so remote
His nostril from his ear, he hears it not.†

Strobilus in the play ridicules the miser, by saying, " That he saved the parings of his nails,

* First part of king Henry IV. act 3. sc. 3.

† This epigram appears to more advantage in the Greek, on account of the great simplicity of the expression.

Οὐ δύναται τῇ χειρὶ Πρῶκλος τὴν ῥίν' ἀπομυρσσεῖν,
Τῆς ῥίνας γὰρ ἔχει τὴν χεῖρα μικροτέρην.
Οὐδέ λένει Ζεῦ σῶσον, ἵαν πλὰρ' ὃ γὰρ ἀκούει
Τῆς ῥίνας, πολὺ γὰρ τῆς ἀκοῆς ἀπέχει.

See Strada. *Pistor Suburranus*. Longinus gives this example of a ludicrous hyperbole.

" Ἀγρον ἰσχυ' ἔλαττω γῆν ἔχοντ' ἄρ' ἐπιστολῆς
Λακωνικῆς.

De subl. sect. 37.

" He was owner of a field not so large as a Lacede-

“and used to exclaim, that he was undone when
“he saw the smoke of his fire escaping through
“the chimney.”* But the most profligate wag
that ever appeared in modern comedy could not
make the moral or intellectual virtues of a good
man ridiculous, merely by magnifying them;
though, by misrepresenting, or by connecting her
with ludicrous imagery, he might no doubt raise
a momentary smile at the expense even of Virtue
herself.

Humorous amplification will generally be
found to imply a mixture of plausibility and
absurdity, or of likeness and dissimilitude. But-
ler’s hero speaks in very hyperbolical terms of
the acute feelings occasioned by kicking and
cudgelling:

Some have been beaten, till they know
What wood the cudgel’s of, by the blow;
Some kick’d, until they can feel, whether
A shoe be Spanish or neat’s leather.†

The fact is impossible: hence the *want of relation* between the cause and the pretended effect.

“monian epistle;” which sometimes consisted of no more
than two or three words. Vide Quintil. Orat. Inst. lib.
8. cap. 3. & 6. Greek and Latin, we see, may be quoted
on trifling as well as important subjects.

* Plaut. Aulul. act 2. sc. 4.

† Hubibras, part 2. canto 1. vers. 221.

Yet when we reflect, that the qualities of wood and leather are perceived by sense, and that some of them may be perceived by the touch or feeling, there appears something like plausibility in what is said; and hence the *seeming relation* between the pretended effect and the cause. And an additional incongruity presents itself, when we compare the seriousness of the speaker with the absurdity of what is spoken. When Smollet, in one of his novels, describing violent fear, says, "He stared like the gorgon's head, with his mouth wide open, and each particular hair crawling and twining like an animated serpent," he raises the portrait far above nature; but at the same time gives it an apparent plausibility, from the effect which fear is supposed to have in making the hair stand on an end. It is, I confess, an awkward thing, to comment upon these and the like passages: and I am afraid, the reader may be tempted to say of the ludicrous quality in the hands of one who thus analyzes it, that,

Like following life in creatures we dissect
We lose it in the moment we detect.

But I hope it will be considered, that I have no other way of explaining my subject in a satisfactory manner. One cannot lay open the elementary

parts of any animal or vegetable system, without violating its outward beauty.

As hyperboles are very common, being used by all persons 'on almost all occasions,* it might be supposed, that, by the frequency of this figure, mirth could easily be promoted in conversation, and a character for humour acquired, with little expense of thought, and without any powers of genius. But that would be a mistake. Familiar hyperboles excite neither laughter nor astonishment. All ludicrous and all sublime exaggeration, is characterised by an uncommonness of thought or language. And laughable appearances in general, whether exhibited to the senses or to the fancy, will for the most part be found to imply something unexpected, and to produce some degree of surprise.

III. Laughter often arises from the discovery of unexpected *likeness* between objects apparently *dissimilar*: and the greater the apparent dissimilitude, and new discovered resemblance, the greater will be the surprise attending the discovery, the more striking the opposition of contrariety and relation, and the more lively the risible emotion. All men, and all children, have a tendency to mark resemblances; hence the allegories, similes, and metaphors, so frequent

* See Essay on Poetry, part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3. § 5.

in common discourse: but readily to find out similitudes that are not obvious, and were never found out before, is no ordinary talent. The person possessed of it is called a man of *wit*; especially if at the same time he possess that other talent of conveying his meaning in concise, perspicuous, and natural language. For I agree with Locke, that "Wit consists chiefly in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy:"* And I also agree with Pope, that "an easy delivery, as well as perfect conception;" and with Dryden, that "propriety of words as well as of thought," is necessary to the formation of true wit. Images and comparisons, conveyed in obscure terms, or in too many words, have little effect upon the mind, because they oblige us to take up time in collecting all the parts of the idea; which must lessen our surprise, and abate the vivacity of the consequent emotion: and if the language, instead of being natural, were quaint and elaborate, we should be disgusted, from an opinion, that the whole was the effect of art, rather than the instantaneous effort of a playful imagination.

* Essay on Human Understanding, book 2. chap. 11. § 2.

It is a rule in serious writing, that similitudes should be neither too obvious, nor too remote. If too obvious, they offend by their insignificancy, give a mean opinion of the author's inventive powers, and afford little variety, because they suggest that only which the reader supposes himself to be already acquainted with. If too remote, they distract the reader's attention; and they show, that the author's fancy is wandering from his subject, and therefore that he himself is not suitably affected with it; a fault which we blame in a serious writer, as well as in a publick speaker or player. Familiar allusions, such as every body may make every day, are to be avoided in humorous composition also; not only because they are insignificant, yield no variety, and give a mean idea of the author, but likewise because they have not incongruity enough to be ludicrous:* for when

* Swift's Song of Similes, *My passion is as mustard strong*, &c. will perhaps occur to the reader as an exception. And it is true of that humorous piece, that most of the comparisons are not only common, but even proverbial. But then there is, in the way of applying them, a species of novelty, that shows a lively and singular turn of fancy in the author, and occasions an agreeable surprise to the reader: and the mutual relation, owing to the juxtaposition, of so many dissonant ideas and incongruous proverbs, cannot fail to heighten greatly the

we have been long accustomed to compare certain things together, or to view them as united in the same assemblage, the one so constantly introduces the other into the mind, that we come to look upon them as congenial. But in ludicrous writing, comparisons, if the point of resemblance be clearly expressed, and the thing alluded to sufficiently known, can scarce be too remote: for here the author is not supposed to be in earnest, and therefore we allow full scope to his fancy; and here the more remote the comparison, the more heterogeneous are the objects compared, and the greater the contrast of congruity and unsuitableness.

Persons who would pass for wits are apt affectedly to interlard their ordinary discourse with similitudes; which, however, unless they are uncommon, as well as apposite, will only betray the barrenness of the speaker's fancy. Fielding ridicules this sort of pedantry, in a dialogue be-

ludicrous effect. Common, or even proverbial allusions may successfully enough be introduced into burlesque, when they surprise by the peculiarity of their application. In this case, though familiar in themselves, they are remote in regard to the subject, and apparently incongruous; and may therefore raise our opinion of the author's wit: as a clock made with the tools of a blacksmith would evince uncommon dexterity in the artist.

tween a bad poet and a player. "Plays (says the man of rhyme) are like tress, which will not grow without nourishment; but, like mushrooms, they shoot up spontaneously, as it were, in a rich soil. The muses, like vines, may be pruned, but not with a hatchet. The town, like a peevish child, knows not what it desires, and is always best pleased with a rattle."*

As some comparisons add to the beauty and sublimity of serious composition, so others may heighten the ludicrous effect of wit and humour. In what respects the former differ from the latter, will be seen afterwards. At present I shall only specify the several classes of ludicrous similitudes, and give an example or two in each, with a view to illustrate my theory.

1. One mean object may be compared to another mean object in such a way as to provoke laughter. In this case, as there is no opposition of meanness and dignity, it will be proper, in order to make the combination sufficiently incongruous, that the thing alluded to, if familiar in itself, be remote in regard to the subject, and such as one would not be apt to think of, on such an occasion.

* See the history of Joseph Andrews, book 3. chap. 10. The whole dialogue is exquisitely humorous.

“ I do remember him (says Falstaff, speaking
 “ of justice Shallow) at Clement’s Inn, like a
 “ man made after supper of a cheese pating.
 “ When he was naked, he was for all the world
 “ like a forked radish, with a head fantastically
 “ carved upon it with a knife.”*

He snatch’d his whinyard up, that fled
 When he was falling off his steed,
 As rats do from a falling house.†

The reader will think, perhaps, that there is
 even in these examples something of greatness
 mixed with meanness, as well as in the following:

Instead of trumpet and of drum,
 Which makes the warrior’s stomach come,
 And whets men’s valour sharp, like beer
 By thunder turn’d to vinegar,‡

but that mixture is more observable, when, 1

2. Things important, serious, or great, are
 ludicrously compared to such as are mean, fri-
 volous, or vulgar. King Arthur, in the tragedy
 of Tom Thumb, hints at an analogy between two
 feelings, that were never before thought to have
 any thing in common.

I feel a sudden pain within my breast,
 Nor know I, whether it proceed from love,
 Or only the wind colick. Time must show.

* Second part of K. Henry IV. act 3. † Hudibras. ‡ Idem.

“ Wisdom (says Swift) is a fox, who, after long
 “ hunting, with at last cost you the pains to dig
 “ out: it is a cheese, which, by how much the
 “ richer, has the thicker, the homelier, and the
 “ coarser coat, and whereof, to a judicious palate,
 “ the maggots are the best: it is a sack posset,
 “ wherein the deeper you go, you will find it the
 “ sweeter. Wisdom is a hen, whose cackling
 “ we must value and consider, because it is at-
 “ tended with an egg. But then, lastly, wisdom
 “ is a nut, which, unless you choose with judg-
 “ ment, may cost you a tooth, and pay you with
 “ nothing but a worm.”*

Musick in general, especially military musick, is an object of great dignity to the serious poet; he describes it with sublime allusions, and in the most harmonious language. Butler, by a contrary artifice, makes one species of it ridiculous.

The kettle-drum, whose sullen dub
 Sounds—like the hooping of a tub.

3. Things in themselves ludicrous and mean may become more ludicrous, by being compared to such as are serious or great; and that, first, when the serious object alluded to is mentioned in simple terms, without debasement or exag-

* Introduction to the Tale of a Tub.

geration;* secondly, when it is purposely degraded by vulgar language and mean circumstances;† and, thirdly, when it is exhibited in all the pomp of numbers and description.‡ Examples of the two first cases are common in *burlesque*; the third is peculiar to the *mock heroick* style.

From these remarks it will appear, that the risible emotion may in various ways be raised or increased by comparison and similitude. Metaphor, allegory, and the other tropes and figures founded in resemblance, may in like manner heighten the effect of ludicrous composition.

Without multiplying examples, I shall only observe, of the allegory in particular, that, provided its design be important and obvious, a great disproportion, in point of dignity, between what it expresses and what it signifies, will not convey any ludicrous idea to a sound mind; unless where an author is at pains to degrade his allegory, either by the extreme meanness of the allusion, or by connecting it with something laughable in the circumstances or phraseology. The fables and parables of ancient times, were not intended to raise laughter, but to instruct mankind. Accordingly, those Greek apologues, which are ascribed to Esop, and bear undoubted marks of anti-

* See Hudibrass, part 1. can. 1. vers. 289.

† See Hudibras, part 2. can. 2. vers. 593.

‡ See Dunciad, book 2. vers. 181.

quity, are delivered in the most simple style, and without any effort to draw the reader's attention to ludicrous ideas, except when these make a part of the story.* But some modern fabulists, particularly L'Estrange, are anxious to have their fables considered, not only as instructive allegories, but also as merry tales; and, in order to make them such, frequently employ ludicrous images, and the most familiar diction. Whether this, or the ancient, form of the apologue, deserve the preference, I shall not now inquire. But I could wish, that where the moral was of great importance, and connected with sacred things, we had, in our fables, imitated rather the simplicity of ancient language, than the levity of modern wit. Ridiculous ideas, associated by custom, with religious truths, can have no good effect upon the mind. And in this view, the book called "*Scotch presbyterian eloquence displayed*," must ever be held in abhorrence by the friends

* And when there is any thing laughable in the circumstances, it often appears to greater advantage in the simple Greek, than in the most elaborate modern paraphrase. The reader may compare *Αλώπηξ καὶ Κόραξ* with *le corbeau et le renard* of Fontaine. The conclusion of the former is remarkably expressive and picturesque, as well as simple: *Ὁ δὲ κόραξ ἀνύσας ταῦτα, καὶ χαυνωθεὶς τοῖς ἐπαίνοις, ῥίψας τὸ κρέας, μεγάλως ἐκεκράγει, δις.*

of religion, even though the writer could be vindicated from the charge of wilful and malicious falsehood. And I cannot but think, that in this view, even the *Tale of a Tub*, notwithstanding its unequalled merit as a piece of humorous writing, is blamable, in the general tenour of the allegory, as well as in particular passages. Are you then one of those gloomy mortals, who think religion an enemy to jocularly? By no means. If I were, I should not now be writing an essay on laughter. Christianity is, in my opinion, not merely a friend to cheerfulness, but the only thing in the world which can make a considerate mind rationally and permanently cheerful. But between smiling and sneering, between complacency and contempt, between innocent mirth and unseasonable buffoonery, there seems to me to be a very wide difference.

After what Addison in the *Spectator*, and Dryden in one of his long prefaces, have said against Hudibrastick rhymes, one can hardly venture to affirm, that a smile may sometimes be occasioned by those unexpected coincidences of sound. I confess, however, that I have been entertained with them in Swift and Butler; and should think him a prudish critick who could turn up his nose at the following couplets:

And pulpit, drum ecclesiastick
Was beat with fist, instead of a stick.—

With words far bitterer than wormwood,
That would in Job or Grizel stir mood——
Though stored with deletery medicines,
Which whosoever took is dead since.——
There was an ancient sage philosopher,
Who had read Alexander Ross over.——

I grant, that these combinations, considered as wit, have little or no merit. Yet they seem to possess in a certain degree the ludicrous character, and to derive it from the *diversity* of the words and meaning as contrasted with the unexpected *similarity* of the sounds. In ordinary rhymes, the sound, being expected, gives no surprise; and, being common, seems natural, and a thing of course: but when two or three words, in the end of one line, correspond in sound to two or three syllables of the same word, in the end of another, the *jarring coincidence* is more striking and more surprising. But as they surprise the more, the less they are expected, and the less they seem to be sought for, these rhymes must lose their effect when too frequent. And the same thing must happen, when they are incorrect, on account of the imperfect resemblance, and because every body knows it is an easy matter to bring words together that have some *letters* only in common: and therefore one is rather offended than entertained with the rhyme of this couplet of Prior:

Know then, when Phebus' rays inspect us,
First, Sir, I read, and then I breakfast.

Hudibrastick rhymes can take place only in burlesque,* such trifling being unsuitable to all serious, poetry, and even to the affected solemnity of the mock heroick.

Some criticks, taking all their notions from the practice of Greece and Rome, have represented rhyme of every kind as a ridiculous thing. But that cannot be ridiculous, to which we are continually accustomed; which, independent on custom, is in itself almost universally pleasing; and which has acquired additional grace and dignity, by being so much used as an ornament in our

* Hobbes, partly by a rhyme of this kind, and partly by a misapprehension of Homer's language, has turned into gross burlesque one of the most admired descriptions in all poetry.

*Η. καὶ κυανέησιν ἱπ' ὄφρουσι νῦνσι Κρονίων·

Λυβρόσαι δ' ἄρα χαῖται ἐπερρώσαντο ἄνακτος

Κρατος ἅπ' ἀθανάτοιο, μέγαν δ' ἱελεῖξεν Ὀλύμπου, &c.

Iliad. I. 528.

This said, with his black brows he to her *nodded*,
Wherewith displayed were his locks divine;
Olympus shook at stirring of his *godhead*;
And Thetis from it jump'd into the brine.

The translator shows also his ignorance of the English tongue, in the use he makes of the last word of his third line.

most beautiful compositions. Similarity of sound in contiguous verses gives pleasure to all children and illiterate persons, and does not naturally offend the ear of any modern European, however learned. Nay we have reason to think, that something of this sort, in the end or beginning* of

* A similarity of sound in the *beginning* of contiguous words, or rather in their initial consonants, has of late been called *alliteration*. Some authors speak of it in terms of the utmost contempt and abhorrence; and as if none but fools and fops could take any pleasure in it. And surely when it recurs often, and seems to be the effect of study, it gives a finical appearance to poetry, and becomes offensive. But that many good judges of poetical harmony have been pleased with it, might be made appear by innumerable examples from Lucretius, Spenser, Dryden, and others. Indeed, previous to the influence of custom, it would not be easy to determine, whether a similarity of sound, in the beginning, or in the end, of contiguous words, were likely to produce the more rational, or more durable entertainment. That both alliteration and rhyme, though not equally perhaps, are however naturally, pleasing to the ears of most people, is evident, not only from what may be observed in children and peasants, but also from the composition of many of our old proverbs, in which some of the words seem to have been chosen for the sake of the initial letters; as, Many men many minds, Spare to speak and spare to speed, Money makes the mare to go, Love me little love me long, Manners make the man, &c. *Christ's kirk*

words, has in all ages been agreeable to all nations whatsoever, the Greeks and Romans not excepted. For to what other *ultimate* principle, than the love of similar final sounds, shall we ascribe the frequent coincidence, in termination, of the Greek and Latin participle and adjective, with the substantive? Homer himself often repeats certain harmonious syllables of similar sound; which he might have avoided, and with which, therefore, as he seems on some occasions rather to seek for than to shun them, we may presume that he was pleased.* It is true, the

on the green, and most of the old Scotch ballads, abound in alliteration. And some ancient English poems are more distinguished by this, than by any other poetical contrivance. In the works of Langland, even where no regard is had to rhyme and but little to a rude sort of anapestick rhythm, it seems to have been a rule, that three words at least of each line should begin with the same letter:

Death came driving after, and all to dust pashed
Kynges and Kaysars, Knightes and Popes.

* Virgil has a few of the same sort,

Cornua velatarum obvertimus antennarum.

Æneid. III.

— formæ magnorum ululare luporum.

Æneid. VII.

I do not find, that the ancient criticks have taken any

Greeks and Romans did not admit, in their poetry, those similar endings of lines, which we call rhyme. The reason probably was, that in the classical tongues, on account of their regular structure, like terminations were so frequent, that it required more dexterity, and occasioned a more pleasing suspense to the ear, to keep them separate, than to bring them together. But in the modern tongues the case is different; and therefore rhyme may in them have a good effect, though in Greek and Latin it must have had a bad one. Besides, one end of rhymes in modern poetry, is to distinguish it more effectually from prose: the Greeks and Romans distinguished theirs by the measure, and by the composition, upon which the genius of their languages allowed them to bestow innumerable graces, in respect of arrangement, harmony, and variety, whereof the best modern tongues, from the irregularity of their structure, particularly from their want of inflexion, are but moderately susceptible: and therefore, of rhyme, as a mark of distinction, our poetry may sometimes stand

notice of this peculiarity. Their *ὁμοτέλευτον* seems to have been a coincidence of sound rather in the last words of contiguous clauses, than in the last syllables or letters of contiguous words. See Demet. Phaler. § 281.; and Rollin's Quintilian, lib. 9. cap. 3. § 2.

in need, though theirs did not. In fact we find, that blank verse, except where the want of rhyme is compensated, as it is in Milton, by the harmony and variety of the composition, can never have a good effect in our *heroick* poetry: of which any person may be satisfied, who looks into Trapp's Virgil, or who, by changing a word in each couplet, takes away the rhyme from any part of Pope's Homer. But the structure of the Miltonick numbers is so finely diversified, and so transcendently harmonious, that, in the perusal of Paradise Lost, we have no more reason to regret the want of rhyme, than, in reading the Essay on Man, or Dryden's Fables, to lament that they were not written in blank verse.

IV. Dignity and meanness united, or supposed to be united, in the same assemblage, form a conspicuous source of ludicrous combination. Innumerable are the examples that might be given on this head, but I shall confine my remarks to a few of the most obvious.

1. Mean sentiments appearing unexpectedly in a serious argument, so as to form what is called an anticlimax, are often productive of laughter. Waller, in a magnificent encomium on the Summer Islands, provokes a smile instead of admiration, by a contrast of this kind.

With candid plantanes, and the juicy pine,
On choicest melons and sweet grapes they dine,
And—with potatoes fat their wanton swine.

2. Mean sentiments, or expressions, in the mouth of those who assume airs of dignity, have the same effect. Dogberry is a memorable instance. "Bombard the suburbs of Pera, (says "a mad shoemaker who fancies himself the "king of Prussia, in one of Smollet's novels) "make a desert of Lusatia—tell my brother "Henry to pass the Elbe with fifty squadrons— "send hither my chief engineer—I'll lay all the "shoes in my shop, the breach will be practica- "ble in four and twenty hours." *Dicta factis exequanda*, is a maxim in historical writing; and, in common life, it may be laid down as a rule to those who wish to avoid the ridicule of others, that they proportion their behaviour to their accomplishments.

3. Mean or common thoughts delivered in pompous language, form a laughable incongruity; of which our mock tragedies, and too often our serious ones, afford many examples. Upon this principle, the character of Pistol is still ludicrous, though the race of coxcombs of whom he is the representative, has been long extinct. The Splendid Shilling of Philips, in which the Miltonick numbers and phraseology

are applied to a trifling subject, is an exquisite specimen of this sort of ridicule; and no part of it more so, than the following lines:

Not blacker tube, nor of a shorter size,
Smokes cambro-Briton (versed in pedigree,
Sprung from Cadwallader and Arthur, kings
Full famous in romantick tale); when he
O'er many a craggy hill, and barren cliff,
Upon a cargo of famed Cestrian cheese,
High overshadowing rides.—

4. A sublime thought, or solemn expression, unexpectedly introduced in the midst of something frivolous, seldom fails to provoke a smile, unless it betray unseasonable levity, or want of taste in the author.

My hair I'd powder in the women's way,
And dress, and talk of dressing, more than they.
I'll please the maids of honour, if I can;
Without black velvet breeches—what is man! *

5. An important or violent passion, proceeding from a cause apparently trifling, is apt (as was remarked already) to excite laughter in the indifferent spectator. Here is a twofold incongruity; a great effect is produced by a small cause, and an important passion by an unimportant

* *The Man of Taste*, by the Rev. Mr. Bramstone, in Dodsley's Collection.

tant object. Sancho Pancha clinging in the dark to the wall of a ruin, with the dreadful apprehension that a bottomless gulf was beneath him, while his feet were within a few inches of the firm ground, is as laughable an instance of distress as can well be imagined. Sentiments, too, that partake but little of the nature of passion, are sometimes ludicrous, when they seem more important than the occasion requires. As when Parson Adams, to show that he was not destitute of money, produces half a guinea, and seriously adds, that ostentation of riches was not his motive for displaying it. A finer piece of humour was never written, than Addison's Journal of the court of honour in the *Tatler*; in which every reader perceives the opposition of dignity and meanness; the latter arising from the insignificance of the causes; the former from the serious air of the narrative, from the accuracy of detail and minuteness of inquiry in the several examinations, and from the grave deportment of the judge and jury. Indeed, through the whole work, the personage of Isaac Bickerstaff is supported with inimitable pleasantry. The conjurer, the politician, the man of humour, the critick; the seriousness of the moralist, and the mock dignity of the astrologer; the vivacities and the infirmities peculiar to old age, are all so blended

and contrasted in the censor of Great Britain, as to form a character equally complex and natural, equally laughable and respectable.

6. To this head may perhaps be referred those passages, whereof the humour results from an elaborate or minute, and at the same time unexpected, illustration of what is obvious or frivolous.

“ *Grumio*. A fire, good *Curtis*. *Curtis*. Is my master and his wife coming, *Grumio*? *Gru*. O, aye, *Curtis*, aye; and therefore fire, fire. *Cast* “ *on no water.*”*

So when two dogs are fighting in the streets,
With a third dog one of the two dogs meets;
With angry tooth he bites him to the bone,
And this dog smarts for what that dog has done.†

7. Mean circumstances in solemn description, seem ridiculous to those who are sensible of the incongruity, except where the effect of that incongruity is counteracted by certain causes to be specified hereafter. Of this blunder in composition the poetry of Blackmore supplies thousands of examples. The lines on Etna, quoted in the treatise on the bathos, are well known. By his contrivance, the mountain is made to labour, not with a subterraneous fire and external

* Taming of the Shrew.

† Fielding's Tom Thumb.

conflagration, but with a fit of the colick; an idea, that seems to have been familiar to him (for we meet with it in other parts of his work); whether from his being subject to that distemper, or, as a physician, particularly successful in curing it, I cannot say. This poet seems to have had no notion of any thing more magnificent, than the usages of his own time and neighbourhood; which, accordingly, he transfers to the most awful subjects, and thus degrades into burlesque what he meant to raise to sublimity. He tells us, that when creation was finished, there was a great rejoicing in heaven, with fireworks and illuminations, and that the angels threw blazing meteors from the battlements.* To the supreme Being he most indecently ascribes a variety of mechanical operations; and represents him as *giving commissions to envoys and agents* to take care of the *heavenly interests* in the land of Palestine, and employing *pioneers to make a road* for him and his army. Nay he speaks of *household troops and guards*, by whose attendance the court of the Almighty is both *graced and defended*.† Indeed the general tenour of this author's sacred poetry is so enormously absurd, as to

* Prince Arthur, p. 50. fourth edition.

† Paraphrases of the Psalms, &c.

move the indignation of a reader of taste, and consequently suppress the laughter, that such incongruity could not fail to raise, if the subject were less interesting.*

But here it may be asked, What is the characteristic of meanness? and what the general nature of those circumstances, sentiments, and allusions, which, by falling below an important subject have a tendency to become ridiculous. The following brief remarks will suggest a hint or two for answering this question.

First: Nothing natural is mean, unless it convey a disgusting idea. The picture of Ulysses' dog,† old and blind, and neglected, is not mean; but the circumstance of his being covered with vermin should have been omitted, because it is both offensive and unnecessary. The description of Evander's fields and cottages, in Virgil,‡ so far from being mean, is more beautiful and of greater dignity, than that of the sun's palace in Ovid, because more natural, more pleasing, and more instructive. Even the vices and crimes of mankind, the cunning of Iago, the perfidy of Macbeth, the cruelty of Mezentius, the pride of Agamemnon, the fury of Achilles, may, from the ends to which they operate, and

* See next chapter. † *Odysseus*. lib. 17. ‡ *Eneid*. lib. 8.

from the moral purposes for which the poet introduces them, acquire dignity sufficient to entitle them to a place in serious poetry of the highest order. Natural views of human character in every condition of life, of human passions even in the most uncultivated minds, and of the external world even where destitute of all ornament, may be rendered both useful and agreeable, and may therefore serve to embellish the most sublime performances; provided that indelicacy be kept at a distance, and the language elevated to the pitch of the composition.

But, secondly, in judging of this sort of propriety, respect must be had to the notions and manners of the people to whom the work was originally addressed: for, by a change of circumstances, any mode of life, any profession, almost any object, may, without losing its name, forfeit part of its original dignity. Few callings are now held in less esteem, than that of itinerant ballad-singers; and yet their predecessors the minstrels were accounted not only respectable but sacred. If we take our idea of a shepherd from those who keep sheep in this country, we shall have no adequate sense of the propriety of many passages in old authors who allude to that character. Shepherds in ancient times were men of great distinction. The riches, and consequently the

power, of many political societies, depended then on their flocks and herds; and we learn, from Homer, that the sons and favourites of kings, and, from scripture, that the patriarchs, took upon them the employment of shepherds. This gave dignity to an office, which in those days it required many virtues and great abilities to execute. Those shepherds must have been watchful and attentive in providing accommodation for their flocks; and strong and valiant, to defend them from robbers and beasts of prey, which in regions of great extent and thinly peopled, would be frequently met with. We find, that David's duty as a shepherd obliged him to encounter a lion and a bear, which he slew with his own hand. In a word, a good shepherd was, in those times, a character in the highest degree respectable both for dignity and virtue. And therefore we need not wonder, that, in holy writ, the most sacred persons should be compared to good shepherds: that kings, in Homer, should be called shepherds of the people:* and that christian ministers should

* A plain and unaffected literal version of Homer, well executed, would be a valuable work. In the perusal indeed it would not be so pleasing as Pope's translation; nor could it convey any adequate idea of the harmony of the original: but by preserving the figures, allusions, and turns of language, peculiar to the great father of poetry,

even now take the name of pastors, and speak of the souls committed to their care under the denomination of a flock.

it would give those who are ignorant of Greek a juster notion of the manners of his age, and of the style of his composition, than can be learned from any translation of him that has yet appeared. Something of this kind the world had reason to expect from madame Dacier, but was disappointed. Homer, as dressed out by that lady, has more of the Frenchman in his appearance, than of the old Grecian. His beard is close shaved, his hair is powdered, and there is even a little *rouge* upon his cheek. To speak more intelligibly, his simple and nervous diction is often wiredrawn into a flashy and feeble paraphrase, and his imagery as well as harmony sometimes annihilated by abbreviation. Nay to make him the more modish, the good lady is at pains to patch up his style with unnecessary phrases and flourishes in the French taste; which have just such an effect in a translation of Homer, as a bagwig and snuff box would have in a picture of Achilles. The French tongue has a simplicity and a style of figures and phrases peculiar to itself; but is so circumscribed by the mode, that it will hardly admit either the ornaments or the plainness of ancient language. *Shepherd of the people* is a favourite expression of Homer's, and is indeed a beautiful periphrasis: it occurs, I think, twelve times in the first five books of the Iliad, and in M. Dacier's prose version of those books, only once. A celebrated French translator of Demosthenes makes the orator address his country-

Is then Homer's poetry chargeable with meanness, because it represents Achilles preparing supper for his guests, the princess Nausicaa washing the clothes of the family, Eumeus making his own shoes, Ulysses the wooden frame of his own bed, and the princes of Troy harnessing their father's chariot? By no means. The poet painted the manners as he saw them: and those offices could not in his time be accounted mean, which in his time employed occasionally persons of the highest rank and merit. May in these offices there is no intrinsick meanness: they are useful and necessary: and even a modern hero might be in circumstances, in which he would think it a singular piece of good fortune to be able to perform them. Whatever serves to make us independent, will always (in the general opinion of mankind) possess dignity sufficient to raise it far above ridicule, when described in proper language. In Homer's days, society was more unsettled than it is now; and princes and great men, being obliged to be more adventurous, were subject to greater changes of fortune,

men, not with the manly simplicity of *ye men of Athens*, but by the gothick title of *gentlemen*: which is as real burlesque, and almost as great an anachronism, as that passage of Prior, where Protogenes's maid invites Apelles to drink tea.

and as liable to cold, weariness, and hunger, as the meanest of their people. It was necessity that made them acquainted with all the arts of life. Nor was their dignity more affected by the employments above mentioned, than that of a modern prince would be, by riding the great horse, or putting on his own clothes.

Thirdly: Every serious writer or speaker sustains a certain character: an historian that, of a man who wishes to know the truth of facts, and to record them agreeably; a preacher, that of one who is deeply affected with the truths of religion, and anxious to impress them upon others; and an epick poet is to be considered as a person, contemplating with admiration a series of great events, and employing all the powers of language, harmony, and fiction, to describe them in the most interesting manner. Now by a peculiar kind of sagacity, either instinctive, or derived from experience, all people of taste know, what thoughts and words and modes of expression are suitable to an author's character, and what are otherwise. If, when he is supposed to be taken up, with admiration of some great object, it should appear, from his language, allusions, or choice of circumstances, that his fancy is wandering to things remote from, or disproportioned to, the thoughts that occupy his mind.

we are struck with the impropriety, as we should be with the unsuitableness of that man's behaviour, who, while he kneeled, and repeated a prayer, should at the same time employ himself in winding up his watch, counting his money, or adjusting his periwig at a lookingglass.

In general, that is a *mean* circumstance, a *mean* allusion, a *mean* expression, which lessens or debases our idea of what it was intended to embellish or magnify. It always brings disappointment, but not always painful disappointment; for meanness may give rise to jocularly, as well as to contempt, disgust, or indignation.

8. Parodies may be ludicrous, from the opposition between *similarity* of phrase, and *diversity* of meaning, even though both the original and the imitation be serious. The following lines in themselves contain no laughable matter:

Bread was his only food, his drink the brook,
So small a salary did his rector send:
He left his laundress all he had, a book:
He found in death, 'twas all he wish'd, a friend.

Yet one reads them with a smile, when one recollects the original:

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere;
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to misery all he had, a tear;
He gain'd from heaven, 'twas all he wished, a friend.

But in most cases the ridicule of parodies will be greatly heightened, when the original is sublime or serious, and the imitation frivolous or mean. The *Lutrin*, *Dunciad*, and *Rape of the Lock*, abound in examples.

Parodies produce their full effect on those only who can trace the imitation to its original. *Clarissa's* harangue in the fifth canto of the last mentioned poem, gives pleasure to every reader; but to those who recollect that divine speech of *Sarpedon*,* whereof this is an exact parody, it must be entertaining in the highest degree. Hence it is, that writers of the greatest merit are most liable to be parodied; for if the reader perceive not the relation between the copy and its archetype, the humour of the parody is lost; and this relation he will not perceive, unless the original be familiar to him. Much of *Lucian's* humour lies in his parodies; the phraseology and composition of *Demosthenes* in particular he often mimicks: and it is reasonable to suppose, that we should be more affected with the humorous writings of the ancients, if we were better acquainted with the authors to whom they occasionally allude. Certain it is, that parody was much in use among them. *Aristotle* speaks of

* *Iliad*, xii. vers. 310. 328.

one Hegemon as the inventor of it;† and justly refers parody in writing, and caricatura in painting to the same species of imitation, namely, to that in which the original is purposely debased in the copy. Homer, Virgil, and Horace, have been more frequently parodied than any other authors. Of modern performances, Hamlet and Cato's soliloquies, and Gray's elegy in a country churchyard, have been distinguished in this way. These mock imitations are honourable to the original authors, because tacit acknowledgments of their popularity: but I cannot applaud those wits who take the same freedom with the phraseology of scripture, as Dodsley has done in his burlesque chronicle of the kings of England. I do not think that he meant any harm; but it is unwise to annex ludicrous ideas to language that should ever be accounted sacred.

9. The ludicrous style may be divided into two sorts, the *mock heroick*, and (taking the word in a strict sense) the *burlesque*. Of the former the Dunciad is a standard, and Hudibras of the latter. A mixture of dignity and meanness is discernible in both. In the first, mean things are made ludicrous by dignity of language and versification; and therefore parodies or imitations of the

† Aristot. Poet. sect. 2.

style and numbers, of sublime poetry, have a very good effect. Thus Homer's *Iliad* is the prototype of the *Batrachomyomachia*,* *Paradise Lost* of the *Splendid Shilling*, and Virgil of the *Dunciad*. Solemnity is the character assumed by the mock heroick poet; he considers little things as great, and describes them accordingly. The *burlesque* author is a buffoon by profession. Great things, when he has occasion to introduce them, he considers as little; and degrades them by mean words and colloquial phrases, by allusions to the manners and business of low life, and by a peculiar levity or want of dignity in the construction of his numbers. Ancient facts and customs are sometimes burlesqued by modern phraseology, as the statue of Cesar or Alexander would be by a modern dress; by that dress, which is too

* The battle of the Frogs and Mice.

† Witness the following description of a Roman triumph, in *Hudibras*, p. 2. c. 2.

As the Aldermen of Rome,
Their foes at training overcome,
Well mounted in their best array,
Upon a carre, and who but they!
And followed by a world of tall lads,
That merry ditties troll'd and ballads,
Did ride with many a good morrow,
Crying, Hey for our town, through the borough.

familiar to our eye to command respect, and which we see every day worn by men of all characters, both good and bad, both important and insignificant. Yet the statue of a modern hero in the dress of Alexander or Cesar would not be ludicrous; partly, because we are accustomed to see the best statues in ancient dresses; partly, because those dresses have more intrinsick beauty than the modern; partly, because we have never seen them applied to any purpose but that of adorning the images of great men; and partly, no doubt, because what bears the stamp of antiquity does naturally command veneration.

In accoutering ancient heroes for the modern stage, it were to be wished, that some regard were had to *costume* and probability. Cato's wig is famous. We have seen Macbeth dressed in scarlet and gold, with a full bottomed periwig, which, on his usurping the sovereignty, was forthwith decorated with two additional tails. Nothing could guard such incongruity from the ridicule of those who know any thing of ancient manners, but either the transcendent merit of the actor and of the play, or the force of habit, which, as will appear by and by, has a powerful influence in suppressing risible emotions. But is it not as absurd to make Cato and Macbeth speak English, as to dress them in periwigs? No: the former practice is justified upon the plea of ne-

cessity; but it can never be necessary to equip an ancient hero with a modern ornament which in itself is neither natural nor graceful. I admit, that the exact Roman dress would not suit the British stage: but might not something be contrived in its stead, which would gratify the unlearned part of the audience, without offending the rest? If such a reformation shall ever be attempted, I hope care will be taken to avoid the error of those painters, who, by joining in one piece the fashions of different centuries, incur the charge of anachronism, and exhibit such figures on their canvas, as never appeared upon earth. I have in my eye a portrait, in other respects of great merit, of the late marischal Keith, who appears habited in a suit of old gothick armour with ruffles of the present fashion at his wrists, a bagwig on his head, and a musket in his hand. Alexander the great, in a hat and feather, wielding a tomahawk, or snapping a pistol at the head of Clytus, would scarce be a greater impropriety. But to return:

These two styles of writing, the *mock heroick* and the *burlesque*, are not essential either to wit or to humour. A performance may be truly laughable, in which the *language* is perfectly serious and *adequate*. And as the pathos that results from incident is more powerful than what arises

merely from vehemence of expression, so an humorous tale, delivered with a grave look and serious phraseology, like Pope's "Narrative of the frenzy of John Dennis," or Arbuthnot's "Account of what passed in London on "occasion of Whiston's prophecy," may be more ludicrous than either the burlesque or mock heroick style could have made it. That a grave face heightens the effect of a merry story has indeed been often observed; and, if we suppose laughter to arise from an unexpected coincidence of relation and contrariety, is easily accounted for.

10. Mean sentiments, or unimportant phrases, delivered in heroick verse, are sometimes laughable, from the solemnity of the measure, and the opposite nature of the language and subject. Gay thought the following couplet ludicrous:

This is the ancient hand and eke the pen,
Here is for horses hay, and meat for men.

But this, if continued, would lose its effect, by raising disgust, an emotion of greater authority than laughter. Nothing is less laughable than a dull poem; but flashes of extreme absurdity may give an agreeable impulse to the spirits of the reader. Extreme absurdity is particularly entertaining in a short performance, where the author seriously meant to do his best; as in epitaphs and love letters written by illiterate persons. Here, if

there is no apparent opposition of dignity and meanness, there may be other kinds of risible incongruity; a vast disproportion between the intention and execution, between the seriousness of the author and the insignificance of his work; besides the many odd contrasts in the work itself, of mean phrases and sentiments aspiring to importance, of sounding words with little signification, of inconsistent or unrelated expressions placed contiguously, of sentences that seem to promise much but end in nothing; not to mention those blunders in writing, and solecisms in language, that sometimes give a ludicrous air to what had a very solemn destination.

Modern language, adapted to those measures of poetry that are peculiar to Greek and Latin, will likewise appear ridiculous to such as are acquainted with the classic authors; on account of the unusual contrast of modern words and ancient rhythm. Hence the ludicrous awkwardness of an English hexameter. It looks as if a man were to walk the street, or come into a room, with the pace of a trotting horse. Between the movement, and that which moves, there is a manifest incongruity. Sir Philip Sydney attempted to introduce the hexameter into the English tongue, and has exemplified it in his *Arcadia*; but it suits not the genius of the language, and has never been adopted by any person who un-

derstood the true principles of English numbers. Wallis, finding that the first verse of the common prose version of the second psalm was by accident an hexameter, has reduced the whole into that measure; but the sound is extremely uncouth. And Watts's English sapphick ode on the last day, notwithstanding the awful subject, has something in the cadence that almost provokes a smile.

There is a poem well known in North Britain, which to a Scotchman who understands Latin is abundantly entertaining. It was written in the beginning of the last century, by the famous Drummond of Hawthornden. The measure is hexameter, the numbers Virgilian, and the language Latin mixed with broad Scotch. Nothing can be more ludicrous than such a jumble. It is dignity and meanness in the extreme; dignity of sound, and meanness of words and ideas. I shall not give a specimen; as the humour is local, and rather coarse, and the images, though strong, not quite delicate.

11. On some of the principles above mentioned, one might explain the ludicrous character of a certain class of absurdities to be met with in very respectable authors, and proceeding from a superabundance of wit, and the affectation of extraordinary refinement. It is not uncommon to

say, of a person¹ who is old, or has long been in danger from a disease supposed mortal, that "he has one foot in the grave and the other following." A certain author, speaking of a pious¹ old woman, is willing to adopt this proverbial amplification, but by his efforts to improve it, presents a very laughable idea to his reader, when he says, that "she had one foot in the grave, and "the other—among the stars." The following verses (spoken by Cortez on his arrival in America) were once no doubt thought very fine; but the reader who attends to the imagery will perceive that they are very absurd, and somewhat ridiculous:

On what new happy climate are we thrown,
So long kept secret, and so lately known?
As if our old world modestly withdrew,
And here in private had brought forth a new.*

Here, besides the jumble of incongruous ideas, there is on the part of the author a violent and solemn effort ending in a frivolous performance.

The pedantick solemnity of the elder gravedigger in *Hamlet*, makes the absurdity of what he says doubly entertaining; and the ridicule is yet further heightened by the seriousness of his companion, who listens to his nonsense, and

* Dryden's Indian Emperor.

thinks himself instructed by it. "For here lies
"the point, (says the clown,) if I drown myself
"wittingly, it argues an act; and an act hath
"three branches; it is to act, to do, and to perform.
"Argal, she drowned herself wittingly. *Other*
"clown. Nay, but hear you, Goodman Delver.
"Clown. Give me leave. Here lies the water, good;
"here stands the man, good: if the man go to this
"water, and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he,
"he goes; mark you that. But if the water come
"to him, and drown him, he drowns not himself.
"Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death,
"shortens not his own life. *Other Clown*. But is
"this law? *Clown*. Aye marry is it: crowner's
"quest law."

Cicero and Quintilian both observe, that an absurd answer, whether casual or intentional, may give rise to laughter;* a remark which Erasmus had in view, perhaps, when he wrote his dialogue called *Absurda*. In this case, the mere juxtaposition of unsuitable ideas may, as already hinted, form the ludicrous quality. But if laughter is ever raised by a pertinent answer proceeding from the mouth of one from whom nothing but absurdity was expected, it would

* Cic. de Orat. lib. 2. sect. 68.; Quint. Inst. Orat. lib. 6. cap. 3.

seem to be in part occasioned by the surprising disproportion of the cause to the effect, of the intellectual weakness of the speaker to the propriety of what is spoken. "How shameful is it that you should fall asleep, (said a dull preacher to his drowsy audience) while that poor creature (pointing to an idiot who was leaning on a staff and staring at him) is both awake and attentive!" "Perhaps, sir, replied the fool, I should have been asleep too, if I had not been an idiot."

Whatever restraint good breeding or good nature may impose upon his company, the imperfect attempts of a foreigner to speak a language he is not master of, must be allowed to be somewhat ludicrous; for they are openly laughed at by children and clowns; and Shakspeare and Moliere have not disdained to make them the objects of comick ridicule. Nor would Aristotle, if we may judge from his definition of comick ridicule, have blamed them for it. In the person who speaks with the intelligence and figure of a man, and the incapacity of a child, there is something like an opposition of dignity and meanness; as well as of similiarity and dissimilitude, in what he says compared with what he should say: there is too a disproportion between the performance and the effort; and there may be blunders

that pervert the meaning. Those solecisms, vulgarly called *bulls*, are of different characters, and cannot perhaps be referred to any one class of laughable absurdity. If, as often happens, they disguise real nonsense with an appearance of sense, and proceed from apparent seriousness through real want of consideration in the speaker, their ludicrous nature may be explained on the principles already specified.

12. In language, there are three sorts of phraseology. 1. Some words and phrases, being always necessary, are used by people of all conditions, and find a place in every sort of writing. These form the bulk of every language; and cannot be said to possess in themselves either meanness or dignity. In the sublimest compositions they are not ungraceful; in works of humour, and in familiar discourse, they may be employed with propriety; and, from the universality of their application, they have the advantage of being understood by all who speak the language to which they belong. 2. Other expressions have a peculiar dignity, because found only in the more elevated compositions, or spoken only by persons of learning and distinction, and on the more solemn occasions of life. Such are the words and phrases peculiar to scripture and religion; such are those that in all polite languages constitute

what is called the poetical dialect;* and such are most words of foreign original, which though naturalized, are not in familiar use. 3. There are also certain phrases and words, which may properly enough be called *mean*; because used chiefly by persons of no learning or breeding, or by others on familiar occasions only,† or in order to express what is trifling or contemptible. Such are trite proverbs, colloquial oaths, and forms of compliment; the ungrammatical phrases of

* See Essay on Poetry, part 2. chap. 1. sect. 2.

† Castalio's translation of the Old Testament does great honour to his learning, but not to his taste. The quaintness of his Latin style betrays a deplorable inattention to the simple majesty of his original. In the Song of Solomon he is particularly injudicious; debasing the magnificence of the language and subject by *diminutives*, which, though expressive of *familiar endearment*, he should have known to be destitute of dignity, and therefore improper on solemn occasions. This incongruous mixture; of sublime ideas and words comparatively *mean*; has a very bad effect, and degrades the noblest poetry almost to the level of burlesque. "Mea columbula, ostende mihi tuum vulticulum; facit audiam tuam voculam; nam et voculam venustulam, et vulticulum habes lepidulum.—Cerviculam habes Davidicæ turris similem.—Cervicula quasi eburnea turricula.—Uti nam esses mihi quasi fraterculus, qui meæ mammas materculæ suxisse.—Venio in meos hortulos, sororcula mea sponsa.—Ego dormio, vigilante meo corculo," &c.

conversation; the dialect peculiar to certain trades; the jargon of beggars, thieves, gamblers, and fops; foreign and provincial barbarisms, and the like. These, if intelligible, may be introduced in *burlesque* writing with good effect, as in *Hudibras* and the *History of John Bull*; but ought never to find a place in serious writing; nor even in the *mock heroick*, except perhaps in a short characteristical speech, like that of sir Plume in the *Rape of the Lock*;* nor indeed in any literary work where elegance is expected. This *cant* style, as it is sometimes called, was very prevalent in England in the latter part of the last century; having been brought in by the courtiers of Charles the second, who, to show their contempt for the solemn character that had distinguished the preceding period, ran into the opposite extreme, and affected profligacy of manners, profaneness of talk, and a loose ungrammatical vulgarity of expression. L'Estrange is full of it, not only in his fables, where burlesque may be pardonable, but even in his translations of Josephus and Tacitus.† Echard, by a similar in-

* See canto 4. vers. 127.

† He makes the grave and sublime Tacitus speak of some gentlemen, "who had *feathered their nests* in the "civil war between Cesar and Pompey;" and tells us, that the emperor Vitellius was *lugged out of his hole* by those who came to kill him.

discretion, has transformed the elegant Terence into a writer of farce and buffoonery. Nay, Dryden himself, in one or two instances, and perhaps in more, has burlesqued both Homer and Virgil, by interlarding his translations with this beggarly dialect.* And some imprudent divines

* So heavy a charge against so great an author ought not to be advanced without proof. In Dryden's version of the first book of the Iliad, Jupiter addresses Juno in these words:

*My household curse, my lawful plague, the spy
Of Jove's designs, his other squinting eye.*

Homer, in the same book, says, "The gods were troubled in the palace of Jove, when Vulcan the renowned artificer began to address them in these words, "with a view to sooth his beloved mother, the white-armed Juno:" which Dryden thus versifies:

*The limping smith observed the sadden'd feast,
And hopping here and there, himself a jest,
Put in his word, that neither might offend,
To Jove obsequious, yet his mother's friend.*

Homer has been blamed, not without reason, for degrading his gods into mortals; but Dryden has degraded them into blackguards. He concludes the book in a strain of buffoonery as gross as any thing in Hudibras:

*Drunken at last, and drowsy, they depart
Each to his house, adorned with labour'd art*

have employed it, where it is most pernicious, and absolutely intolerable, even in religion itself.

Rutherford's Letters, well known in North Britain, are notorious in this way; not so much

Of the lame architect. The thundering god,
Even he withdrew to rest, and *had his load*;
His *sweetening head to needful sleep apply'd*,
And Juno *lay unheeded by his side*.

The passage literally rendered is no more than this. "Now, when the shining light of the sun was gone down, the other gods being inclined to slumber, departed to their several homes, to where Vulcan, the lame deity, renowned for ingenious contrivance, had built for each a palace. And Olympian Jove, the thunderer, went to the bed where, when sleep came upon him, he was accustomed to repose. Thither ascending, he resigned himself to rest; and near him Juno distinguished by the golden throne." It is said, that Dryden once intended to translate the whole Iliad. Taking this first book for a specimen, I am glad, both on Homer's account and on his own, that he did not. It is tainted throughout with a dash of burlesque, (owing not only to his choice of words, but also to his paraphrases and additions), and with so much of the profane cant of his age, that if we were to judge of the poet by the translator, we should imagine the Iliad to have been partly designed for a satire upon the clergy.

Virgil, in his ninth eclogue, puts these words in the mouth of an unfortunate shepherd.

O Lycida, vivi pervenimus, advena nostri,
Quod nunquam veriti sumus, ut possessor agelli

for the rudeness of the style in general, for that might be pardoned in a Scotch writer who lived one hundred and twenty years ago, as for the allusions and figures, which are inexcusably gross and groveling. A reader who is unacquainted with the character of Rutherford might imagine, that those letters must have been written with a view to ridicule every thing that is sacred. And though there is reason to believe the author had no bad meaning, one cannot without horror see religion profaned by a phraseology which one would sooner expect from a profligate clown in an alehouse, than from a clergyman. Such performances are very detrimental to true piety; they pervert the ignorant, and encourage the

Diceret, Hæc mea sunt, veteres migrate coloni.
Nunc victi, tristes, quoniam fors omnia versat,
Hos illi (quod nec bene vertat!) mittimus hædos.

It is strange that Dryden did not perceive the beautiful simplicity of these lines. If he had, he would not have written the following ridiculous translation.

O Lycydas, at last

The time is come I never thought to see,
(Strange revolution for my farm and me),
When the *grim captain* in a surly tone
Cries out, *Pack up, ye rascals, and begone.*
Kick'd out, we set the best face on't we could,
And these two kids, t'appease his angry mood,
I bear; of which *the furies give him good.* }

profaneness of the scoffer. Nor let it be said, that they make religious truths intelligible to the vulgar: rather say, that they tend to make it appear contemptible. Indeed a preacher, who affects a display of metaphysical learning, or interlards his composition with terms of art or science, or with uncommon words derived from the Greek and Latin, must be little understood by unlettered hearers: but that is a fault which every preacher who has the instruction of his people at heart and is master of his language and subject, will carefully and easily avoid. For between plainness and meanness of expression there is a very wide difference. Plain words are universally understood, and may be used in every argument, and are especially requisite in all writings addressed to the people. Mean language has no standard, is different in different places, and is applicable to burlesque arguments only. Gulliver's Travels, or the Draper's Letters, are intelligible in every part of England; but the dialects of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Somersetshire, are hardly understood beyond the limits of these provinces. A sermon in broad Scotch would now seem ridiculous to a Scotch peasant, and withal be less intelligible than one of Swift or Atterbury's.

Few things in language have a more debasing

influence than provincial barbarisms; because we seldom hear them, except from illiterate people, and on familiar occasions.* Hence upon the principles here laid down, it might be presumed *a priori*, that to those who thoroughly understand them, they would be apt to appear ludicrous; especially when either the subject, or the condition of the speaker, gave ground to expect a more polite style. And this is so much the case, that

* There is an obvious difference between dialect and pronunciation. A man may be both learned and well-bred, and yet never get the better of his national accent. This may make his speech ungraceful, but will not render it ridiculous; it becomes ridiculous only when it is debased by those vulgarities that convey a mean idea of the speaker. Every Scotchman of taste is ambitious to avoid the solecisms of his native dialect. And this by care and study he may do, and be able even in familiar discourse, to command such a phraseology as, if committed to writing, would be allowed to be pure English. He may too so far divest himself of his national accent as to be perfectly intelligible, wherever the English language is understood. But the niceties of English pronunciation he cannot acquire, without an early and long residence among English people who speak well. It is however to be hoped, that in the next century this will not be so difficult. From the attention that has of late been paid to the study of the English tongue, the Scots have greatly improved both their pronunciation and their style within these last thirty years.

in North Britain it is no uncommon thing to see a man obtain a character for jocularitv, merely by speaking the vulgarbroad Scotch. To write in that tongue, and yet write seriously, is now impossible; such is the effect of *mean* expressions applied to an *important* subject: so that if a Scotch merchant or man of business, were to write to his countryman in his native dialect, the other would conclude that he was in jest. Not that this language is *naturally* more ridiculous than others. While spoken and written at the court of Scotland, and by the most polite persons in the kingdom, it had all the dignity that any other tongue, equally scanty and uncultivated, could possess; and was a dialect of English, as the Dutch is of German, or the Portuguese of Spanish; that is, it was a language derived from and like another, but subject to its own laws, and regulated by the practice of those who writ and spoke it. But, for more than half a century past, it has, even by the Scots themselves, been considered as the dialect of the vulgar; the learned and polite having for the most part, adopted the English in its stead; a preference justly due to the superiour genius of that noble language, and the natural effect of the present civil constitution of Great Britain. And now, in Scotland, there is no such thing as a standard of the native tongue; nothing passes

for good language, but what is believed to be English; every county thinks its own speech preferable to its neighbour's, without entertaining any partiality for that of the chief town: and the populace of Edinburgh speak a dialect not more intelligible, nor less disagreeable, to a native of Buchan, than the dialect of Buchan is to a native of Edinburgh.

The greater part of Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* is written in a broad Scotch dialect. The sentiments of that piece are natural, the circumstances interesting; the characters well drawn, well distinguished, and well contrasted; and the fable has more probability than any other pastoral drama I am acquainted with. To an Englishman who had never conversed with the common people of Scotland, the language would appear only antiquated, obscure or unintelligible; but to a Scotchman who thoroughly understands it, and is aware of its vulgarity, it appears *ludicrous*; from the contrast between *meanness* of phrase, and *dignity* or *seriousness* of sentiment. This gives a farcical air even to the most affecting parts of the poem; and occasions an impropriety of a peculiar kind, which is very observable in the representation. And accordingly, this play, with all its merit, and with a strong national partiality in its

favour, has never given general satisfaction upon the stage.

I have finished a pretty full enumeration of examples; but am very far from supposing it so complete, as to exhibit every species of ludicrous absurdity. Nor am I certain, that the reader will be pleased with my arrangement, or even admit that all my examples have the ludicrous character. But slight inaccuracies, in an inquiry so little connected with practice, will perhaps be overlooked as not very material; especially when it is considered that the subject, though familiar, is both copious and delicate, and though frequently spoken of by philosophers in general terms, has never before been attempted, so far as I know, in the way of induction. At any rate, it will appear from what has been said, that the theory here adopted is plausible at least; and that the philosophy of laughter is not wholly unsusceptible of method. And they who may think fit to amuse themselves at any time with this speculation, whatever stress they may lay upon my reasoning, will perhaps find their account in my collection of examples. And, provided they substitute a more perfect theory of their own in its stead, I shall not be offended, if by means of these very examples they should find out and demonstrate the imperfection of mine.

CHAPTER III.

Limitations of the preceding Doctrine. Incongruity not Ludicrous, I. When customary and common; nor, II. When it excites any powerful emotion in the beholder, as, 1. Moral Disapprobation, 2. Indignation or Disgust, 3. Pity, or, 4. Fear; III. Influence of Goodbreeding upon Laughter; IV. Of Similitudes, as connected with this subject; V. Recapitulation.

THAT an opposition of relation and contrariety is often discernible in those things which we call ludicrous, seems now to be sufficiently proved. But does every such opposition or mixture of contrariety and relation, of suitableness and incongruity, of likeness and dissimilitude, provoke laughter? This requires further disquisition.

I. If an old Greek or Roman were to rise from his grave, and see the human head and shoulders overshadowed with a vast periwig; or were he to contemplate the native hairs of a fine gentleman arranged in the present form* part standing

* In the year 1764.

erect, as if their owner were beset with hobgoblins, and part by means of grease and meal consolidated into paste, he could hardly fail to be struck with the appearance: and I question, whether the features even of Heraclitus himself, or of the younger Cato, would not relax a little upon the occasion. For in this absurd imitation of nature, we have likeness coupled with dissimilitude, and imaginary grace with real deformity, and inconvenience sought after with eagerness, and at considerable expense. Yet in these fashions they who are accustomed to them do not perceive any thing ridiculous. Nay, were we to see a fine lady dressed according to the mode still extant in some old pictures, with her tresses all hanging about her eyes, in distinct and equal portions like a bunch of candles, and twisted into a hundred strange curls, we should certainly think her a laughable phenomenon; though the same object two centuries ago would have been gazed at with admiration and delight. There are few incongruities to which *custom* will not reconcile us.† Nay, so wonderfully ductile is the taste

† In the age of James the first, when fashion had consecrated the *pun* and *paronomasia*, the hearers of a quibbling preacher, were, I doubt not, both attentive and serious; as the universal prevalence of witticism,

of some people, that, in the various revolutions of fashion, they find the same thing *charming* while in vogue, which when obsolete is altogether *frightful*. Incongruity, therefore, in order to be ludicrous, must be in some measure uncommon.

even on solemn occasions, would almost annihilate its ludicrous effect. But it may be doubted, whether any audience in Great Britain would now maintain their gravity, if they were to be entertained with such a sermon, as *Sulton's Caution for the Credulous*: from which, for the reader's amusement, I transcribe the following passages:—"Here I have undertaken one who hath overtaken many, a *Machiavillian*, (or rather a *matchless villain*) one that professeth himself to be a *friend*, when he is indeed a *fiend*.—His greatest *amity* is but *dissembled enmity*.—His *awe* threatens a *we*; and therefore listen not to his treacherous *awe*, but hearken unto Solomon's *cave*; and though he speaketh favourably, believe him not.—Though I call him but a *plain* flatterer, (for I mean to deal very *plainly* with him) some compare him to a devil. If he be one, these words of Solomon are a *spell* to *expel* this devil.—*Wring* not my words, to *wrong* my meaning; I go not about to crucify the *sons* but the *sins* of men.—Some flatter a man for their own private benefit:—this man's heart thou hast in thy pocket; for if thou *find* in thy *purse* to give him presently, he will *find* in his heart to *love* thee everlastingly." *A Caution for the Credulous*. By Edw. Sulton, Preacher. quarto, pp. 44. Aberdeen printed, 1629. Edinburgh reprinted, 1696.

To this it will be objected, that those ludicrous passages in books, that have been many times laughed at by the same person, do not entirely lose their effect by the frequency of their appearance. But many circumstances concur to perpetuate the agreeable effect of those passages. We forget them in the intervals of reading, and thus they often become almost new to us: when we read them a second or third time, the remembrance of the former emotion may serve to heighten the present; when we read them in company, or hear them read, our emotions are enforced by sympathy; and all this while the wit or humour remains the same, unimpaired and unaffected by accidental associations. Whereas, on the other hand, there are many circumstances that tend in time to obliterate, or at least to soften, what at first might seem ridiculous in modes of conversation or dress. For things are not always agreeable or disagreeable in proportion to their intrinsick beauty or deformity; much will depend on extraneous and accidental connections: and, as men who live in society do daily acquire new companions, by whom their manners are in some degree tinctured; so whatever is driven about in the tide of human affairs is daily made a part of some new assemblage, and daily contracts new qualities from those things

that chance associates with it. A vast periwig is in itself perhaps somewhat ridiculous; but the person who wears it may be a venerable character. These two objects, being constantly united, derive new qualities from each other: the wig may at first raise a smile at the expense of the wearer, but the wearer will at last render even his wig respectable. The fine lady may have a thousand charms, every one of which is more than sufficient to make us fond of the little irregularities of her temper, and much more to reconcile us to any awkward disposition of her ringlets or apparel. And the fine gentleman, whose hair in its economy so little resembles that of Milton's Adam,* may be what no ungracefulness of shape or feature will ever expose to ridicule, a faithful friend, a valiant soldier, an agreeable companion, or a dutiful son. Our natural love of society, the various and substantial pleasures we derive from that source, and our proneness to imitation, not to mention the power of custom, soon reconcile us to the manners of those with whom we live; and therefore cannot fail to recommend their external appearance.

* ——— hyacinthin locks

Round from his parted forelock manly hung
Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad.

Paradise Lost, book 4.

All the nations in Europe, and perhaps all the nations on earth, are, in some particulars of dress or deportment, mutually ridiculous to one another; and to the vulgar of each nation, or to those who have never been from home, nor conversed with strangers, the peculiarities of foreign behaviour are most apt to appear ludicrous. Persons who, by travel or extensive acquaintance, are become familiar with foreign manners, see nothing ridiculous in them: and it is therefore reasonable, that a disposition to laugh at the dress and gestures of a stranger (provided these be unaffected on his part) should be taken for a mark of rusticity, as well as of illnature. Tragedies written in rhyme, or pronounced in recitative, may be thought ridiculous, when one has seen but little of them; but it is easy to give a reason why they should be highly and seriously interesting in France and Italy. That cannot be ludicrous, that must, on the contrary, be the object of admiration, to which we have been accustomed to annex ideas of festivity and leisure, of beauty and magnificence, which we have always heard spoken of as a matter of universal concern, and with which from our infancy we have been acquainted.

May we not, then, set it down, as a character of ludicrous absurdity, that it is in some degree *new and surprising*? Witticisms that appear to be

studied give offence, instead of entertainment: and nothing sets off a merry tale to so great advantage as an unpromising simplicity of style and manner. By virtue of this negative accomplishment, men of moderate talents have been known to contribute more to the mirth of the company, than those could ever do, who, with superiour powers of genius, were more artful in their language, and more animated in their pronunciation. Conciseness, too, when we intend a laughable conclusion, is an essential requisite in telling a story; nor should any man attempt to be diffuse in humorous narrative, but he whose wit and eloquence are very great. A joke is always the worse for being expected: the longer it is withheld, after we are made to look for it, the more will its volatile spirit lose by evaporation. The greatest masterpieces in ludicrous writing would become insipid, if too frequently perused; *decies repetita placebit* is a character that belongs to few of them: and I believe every admirer of Cervantes and Fielding would purchase at a considerable price the pleasure of reading Tom Jones and Don Quixote for the first time. It is true, a good comedy, well performed, may entertain the same person for many successive evenings; but some varieties are always expected, and do generally take place, in each new representation;

and though the wit and the business of every scene should come at last to be distinctly remembered, there will still be something in the art of the player, which one would wish to see repeated.

II. But as every surprising incongruity is not ludicrous, we must pursue our speculations a little further.

1. A more striking absurdity there is not in the whole universe, than a vicious man. His frame and faculties are human: his moral nature, originally inclined to rectitude, is sadly perverted, and applied to purposes not less unsuitable to humanity, than dancing is to a bear, or a sword and snuff box to a monkey. He judges of things, not by their proper standard, nor as they are in themselves, but as they appear through the medium of his own variable and artificial appetites; as the clown is said to have applied his candle to the sundial to see how the night went. He overlooks and loses real good, in order to attain that of which he knows not whether it be good, or whether it be attainable; like the dog in the fable, losing the substance by catching at a shadow. He justifies his conduct to his own mind, by arguments whereof he sees the fallacy; like the thief endeavouring to enrich himself by stealing out of his own pocket. He purposes to take up and reform, whenever his appetites are fully gratified;

like the rustick, whose plan was, to wait till the water of the river should run by, and then pass over dryshod. He attempts what is beyond his reach, and is ruined by the attempt; like the frog that burst by endeavouring to blow herself up to the size of an ox. In a word, more blunders and absurdities, than ever the imitators of Esop ascribed to the beasts, or Joe Millar to the Scots and Irish, might easily be traced out in the conduct of the wicked man. And yet, vice, however it may *surprise* by its novelty or enormity, is by no means an object of laughter, even to those who perceive in it all the absurdities I have specified. We pity, and in some cases we abhor, the perpetrator; but our mind must be depraved like his own, if we laugh at him.

But can pity, abhorrence, and risibility, be excited by the same object, and at the same time? Can the painful passions of hatred and horror, and the pleasurable feeling that accompanies laughter, exist at one and the same instant in a well informed mind? Can that amuse and delight us by its absurdity, which our moral principle, armed with the authority of heaven, declares to be shameful, and worthy of punishment? It is impossible: emotions, so different in their nature, and so unequal in power, cannot dwell together; the weaker must give place to the stronger. And

which is the weaker? moral disapprobation, or the ludicrous sentiment? Are the pleasures of wit and humour a sufficient counterpoise to the pangs of a wounded spirit? Are a jest and a generous action equally respectable? In affliction, in sickness, at the hour of death, which is the better comforter, an approving conscience, or a buffoon? the remembrance of a well spent life, or of our connection with a witty society? The glow worm and the sun are not less susceptible of comparison. It would seem then, that those absurdities in ourselves or others, which provoke the disapprobation of the moral faculty, cannot be ludicrous; because in a sound mind they give rise to emotions inconsistent with, and far more powerful than, that whereof laughter is the outward indication.

But what do you say of those *comedies* and *satires*, which put us out of conceit with our vices, by exposing them to laughter? Such performances, surely cannot be all unnatural; and if they are not, may not vice be made a ludicrous object? Our follies, and vices of less enormity, may, I grant, be exhibited in very laughable colours; and if we can be prevailed on to see them in a *ridiculous* light, that is both to *laugh at* and to *despise* them, our reformation may be presumed to be in some forwardness: and hence

the utility of *ridicule*, as an instrument of moral culture. But if we only *laugh at* our faults, without *despising* them, that is, if they appear *ludicrous* only, and not *ridiculous*, it is to be feared, that we shall be more inclined to love than to hate them: and hence the imperfection of those writings, in which human follies are made the subject of mere pleasantry and amusement. I cannot admit, that to a sound mind undisguised immorality can ever cease to be disgusting; though I allow, that the guilty person may possess qualities sufficient to render him agreeable upon the whole. This indeed happens too often in life; and it is this that makes bad company so fatally ensnaring. This too, the comick muse, laying aside the Character of a moralist, and assuming that of a pimp, has too often introduced upon the stage. But, however profligate a poet may be, we are not to suppose, that downright wickedness can ever in itself be a laughable object to any decent assembly of rational beings. The *Provoked Wife*, the *Old Bachelor*, the *Beggar's Opera*, are dangerous plays no doubt, and scandalously immoral; but it is the wit and the humour, not the villany, of *Brute*, *Belmour*, and *Macheath*, that makes the audience merry; and *Vanburgh*, *Congreve*, and *Gay*, are blamable, not because they have made beastliness, robbery,

lying, adultery, ludicrous, (for that I believe was not in their power) but because they adorn their respective reprobates with engaging qualities to seduce others into imitation. But may not criminal adventures be so disguised and misrepresented, as to extort a smile even from a man of good principles? This may be, no doubt; for, as the forms of falsehood are infinite, it is not easy to say, how many strange things may be effected by misrepresentation. While the moral faculty is inactive or neuter, the ludicrous sentiment may operate; but to have a just sense of the enormity of a crime, and at the same time to laugh at it, seems impossible, or at least unnatural: and therefore, we may venture to repeat, that moral disapprobation is a more powerful emotion than laughter; and consequently that both, as their natures are inconsistent, cannot at the same time prevail in a well informed mind. "They are fools who laugh at sin;" and, whatever may be the practice of profligates, or of good men under the influence of a temporary infatuation, the common feelings of mankind do not warrant so gross an impropriety.

As to *satire*, we must observe, that it is of two sorts, the comick and the serious; that human foibles are the proper objects of the former, and vices and crimes of the latter; and that it

ought to be the aim of the satirist to make those ridiculous, and these detestable. I know not how it comes to pass, that the comick satire should be so much in vogue; but I find that the generality of criticks are all for the moderation and smiling graces of the courtly Horacé, and exclaim against the vehemence and vindictive zeal of the unmannerly Juvenal. They may as well blame Sophocles for not adopting the style of Aristophanes, and insist that Cicero should have arraigned Verres in the language of Anacreon. Nor do Horace and Juvenal admit of comparison in this respect,* any more than a chapter of the Tale of a Tub can be compared with one of the Saturday papers in the Spectator. These poets had different views, and took different subjects; and therefore it was right that there should be a difference in their manner of writing. Had Juvenal made a jest of the crimes of his contemporaries, all the world would have called him a bad writer and a bad man. And had Horace, with the severity of Juvenal, attacked the

* Nor indeed in any respect. Different in their views, and in their subjects, they differ no less in style. That of Horace (in his satires) is indeed superlatively elegant, but easy, familiar, and apparently artless. The style of Juvenal is elaborate, harmonious, vehement, poetical, and often sublime.

impertinence of coxcombs, the pedantry of the stoicks, the fastidiousness of luxury, and the folly of avarice, he would have proved himself ignorant of the nature of things, and even of the meaning of his own precept:

————— Adsit

Regula, peccatis quæ panas irroget æquas,
Ne scutica dignum horribili sectere flagello.*

That neither Horace nor Juvenal ever endeavoured to make us laugh at crimes, I will not affirm; but for every indiscretion of this kind they are to be condemned, not imitated. And this is not the general character of their satire. Horace laughed at the follies and foibles of mankind; so far he did well. But Juvenal (if his indecencies had died with himself) might, as a moral satirist, be said to have done better. Fired with honest indignation at the unexampled degeneracy of his age; and, disdaining that tameness of expression and servility of sentiment, which in some cases are infallible marks of a dastardly soul, he dragged vice from the bower

- * Let rules be fix'd that may our rage contain,
And punish faults with a proportion'd pain:
And do not flay him, who deserves alone
A whipping for the fault that he has done.

Creech.

of pleasure and from the throne of empire, and exhibited her to the world, not in a ludicrous attitude, but in her genuine form; a form of such loathsome ugliness, and hideous distortion, as cannot be viewed without horror.

We repeat therefore, that wickedness is no object of laughter; the disapprobation of conscience, and the ludicrous sentiment, being emotions inconsistent in their nature, and very unequal in power. In fact, the latter emotion is generally weak, and never should be strong; while the former in every mind ought to be, and in every sound mind is, the most powerful principle of the human constitution.

2. Further: When sacred things are profaned by meanness of allusion and language, the incongruity will not force a smile from a well disposed person, except it surprise him in an unguarded moment. I could quote, from Blackmore and Rutherford, thoughts as incongruous as any that ever disgraced literature, but which are too shocking to raise any other emotions than horror and indignation. From an author far more respectable I shall give one instance, to show how debasing it is, even to a great genius, to become a flatterer.

False heroes, made by flattery so,

Heaven can strike out, like sparkles, at a blow;

But, ere a prince is to perfection brought,
He costs Omnipotence a second thought:
With toil and sweat,
With hardening cold and forming heat,
The Cyclops did their work repeat,
Before the impenetrable shield was wrought.*

Anger too is generally, while it lasts, a preservative against risible impressions; whence great laughers are supposed to be goodnatured. While all England laughed at the heroes of the Dunciad, Colley Cibber and his brethren were, I dare say, perfectly serious. And if the gravity of Edmund Curll was overcome by that "account of his poisoning," which no other person's gravity could ever withstand, he must have possessed a great deal of philosophy or insensibility. Socrates, in the Athenian theatre, joining in the laugh that Aristophanes had raised against him, is spoken of by old authors as a singular instance of selfcommand: which I mention, not with a view to compare the sage with the bookseller, but to show that anger and laughter were supposed to have the same influence on each other two thousand years ago, which they are found to have at this present time.

3. Even pity alone is, for the most part, of

* Dryden's *Threnodia Augustalis*.

power sufficient to control risibility. To one who could divest himself of that affection, a wooden leg might perhaps appear ludicrous, from the striking contrast of incongruity and similitude: and in fact we find that Butler has made both himself and his readers merry with an implement of this sort that pertained to the expert Crowdero; and that Smollet has taken the same freedom, for the same purpose, with his friend lieutenant Hatchway. But he who forgets humanity so far, as to smile at such a memorial of misfortune in a living person, will be blamed by every good man. We expect, because from experience we know it is natural, that pity should prevail over the ludicrous emotion.

“ Many a Scotch presbyterian (says Hutcheson, in his *Reflections upon Laughter*) has been put to it to preserve his gravity, upon hearing the application of scripture made by his coun-tryman Dr. Pitcairn, as he observed a crowd in the streets about a mason, who had fallen along with his scaffold, and was overwhelmed with the ruins of the chimney which he had been building, and which fell immediately after the fall of the poor mason: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours and their works follow them.” For the honour of the learned physician’s memory, I

hope the story is not true. Such wantonness of impiety, and such barbarity of insult, is no object of laughter, but of horror. And I confess, I should have no good opinion of any presbyterian, or of any person, who could find it difficult to preserve his gravity on hearing it told.

4. Fear is a passion, which would I think on almost any occasion repress laughter. To conceal one's fear, one might feign a laugh; and any passion in extreme may produce a similar convulsion: but nobody laughs at that which makes him seriously afraid, however, incongruous its appearance may be. A friend of mine dreamed that he saw the devil, and awoke in a great fright. He described the phantasm very minutely; and sure a more ridiculous one was never imagined; but, instead of laughter, his countenance betrayed every symptom of horror; for the dream had made a strong impression, nor could he for many months think of it without uneasiness. It is strange, that the common people, who are so much afraid of the devil, should fancy him to be of a ludicrous figure, with horns, a tail, and cloven feet, united to the human form. Sir Thomas Brown, with no little plausibility, derives this conceit from the Rabbins.* But the Romans, from their ascribing un-

* *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, book 5. chap. 21.

accountable fear to the agency of Pan, whose supposed figure was the same, appear to have been possessed with a similar superstition, in whatever way they came by it. Satyrs, however, were believed to be merry beings; always piping and dancing, and frisking about, cracking their jokes, and throwing themselves into antick attitudes; and indeed when they are introduced in a picture, they generally convey somewhat of a ludicrous impression, as the sight of such an animal, supposed to be harmless, could hardly fail to do.

III. Goodbreeding lays many restraints upon laughter, and upon all other emotions that display themselves externally. And this leads me to speak of those refinements in wit and humour, which take place in society, according as mankind improve in polite behaviour.

Lord Froth in the play called the Double Dealer,[†] and lord Chesterfield, in a book of letters which some think might have borne the same appellation, declaim vehemently against laughter: "There is nothing more unbecoming
" a person of quality, than to laugh; 'tis such a
" vulgar thing: every body can laugh." Influenced by a doctrine of so high authority, many of my readers may, I am afraid, have been inclined

[†] Act 1. scene 4.

to think hardly of me, for analyzing vulgar witticisms, and inquiring into the nature of a phenomenon, which can no longer show its face in genteel company. And therefore it may be proper for me to say a word or two in defence, first of myself, and secondly of my subject.

In behalf of myself I can only plead, that laughter, however unfashionable, is a real and a natural expression of a certain human emotion, or inward feeling; and has been so, for any thing I know to the contrary, ever since the days of Adam: that therefore it is as liable to the cognisance of philosophy, as any other natural fact; and that we are to judge of it, rather from its unrestrained energies, than from the appearances it may assume under the control of affectation or delicacy. The foot of a Chinese beauty is whiter, no doubt, and prettier, than that of a Scotch highlander; yet I would advise those who are curious to know the parts and proportions of that limb, to contemplate the clown rather than the lady. To be master of one's own temper, is a most desirable thing; and much more pleasant it is to live with such as are so, than among those who, without caution or disguise, speak, and look, and act, according to the impulse of passion: but the philosopher who would analyze anger, pride, jealousy, or any other vio-

lent emotion, will do well to take its phenomena rather from the latter than from the former. Just so, in tracing out the cause of laughter, I did not think it necessary or expedient to confine my observation to those pleasantries which the *sentimental* critick would honour with a simper: it suited my purpose better to attend to examples, which, whether really laughed at or no, the generality of mankind would acknowledge to be laughable.

That all men are not equally inclined to laughter; and that some may be found, who rarely indulge in it themselves, and actually dislike it in others, cannot be denied. But they are greatly mistaken, who suppose this character to be the effect of good breeding, or peculiar to high life. In the cottage you will find it, as well as in the drawing room. Nor is profuse laughter peculiar to low life: it is a weakness incident to all stations; though I believe, that among the *wiser* sort, both of clowns and of quality, it may be less common.

But the present inquiry does not so much regard laughter itself, as that pleasurable emotion or sentiment, whereof laughter is the outward sign, and which may be intensely felt by those who do not laugh at all; even as the person who never weeps may yet be very tenderhearted. Nay as the keenest and most rational sorrow is

not the most apt to express itself in tears; so the most admirable performances in wit and humour are not perhaps the most laughable; admiration being one of those powerful emotions that occasionally engross the whole soul, and suspend the exercise of its faculties. And therefore, whatever judgment the reader may have formed concerning the lawfulness, expediency, or propriety, of this visible and audible convulsion called Laughter, my account of the cause of that internal emotion which generally gives rise to it, may be allowed to be pardonable, if it shall be found to be just. Nor does lord Chesterfield, as I remember, object to this emotion, nor to a smile as the outward expression of it, so long as the said smile is not suffered to degenerate into an open laugh.

Goodbreeding is the art of pleasing those with whom we converse. Now we cannot please others, if we either show them what is displeasing in ourselves, or give them reason to think that we perceive what is displeasing in them. Every emotion, therefore, that would naturally arise from bad qualities in us, or from the view of them in others, and all those emotions in general which our company may think too violent, and cannot sympathize with, nor partake in, goodbreeding requires that we suppress. Laughter, which is

either too profuse or too obstreperous, is an emotion of this kind: and therefore, a man of breeding will be careful not to laugh much longer, or much oftener than others; nor to laugh at all, except where it is probable that the jest may be equally relished by the company. These, and other restraints peculiar to polished life, have, by some writers, been represented as productive of fraud, hypocrisy, and a thousand other crimes, from which the honest, open, and undesigning savage is supposed to be entirely free. But, were this a fit place for stating the comparison, we could easily prove, that the restraints of good-breeding render society comfortable, and, by suppressing the outward energy of intemperate passions, tend not a little to suppress those passions themselves: while the unbridled liberty of savage life, gives full play to every turbulent emotion, keeps the mind in continual uproar, and disqualifies it for those improvements and calm delights, that result from the exercise of the rational and moral faculties.

But to return. The more we are accustomed to any set of objects, the greater delicacy of discernment we acquire in comparing them together, and estimating their degree of excellence. By studying many pictures one may become a judge of painting; by attending to the ornaments and

proportions of many buildings, one acquires a taste in architecture; by practising musick, we improve our sense of harmony; by reading many poems, we learn to distinguish the good from the bad. In like manner, by being conversant in works of wit and humour, and by joining in polite conversation, we refine our taste in ridicule, and come to undervalue those homelier jokes that entertain the vulgar. What improves individuals will in time improve nations. Plautus abounds in pleasantries that were the delight of his own and of the following age, but which at the distance of one hundred and fifty years, Horace scruples not to censure for their inurbanity.* And we find not a few even in Shakspeare (notwithstanding the great superiority of his genius) at which a critick of these days would be less inclined to laugh than to shake his head. Nay in the time of Charles the second, many things passed upon the English stage for excellent humour, which would now be intolerable. And thus it is, that we are enabled to judge of the politeness of nations, from the delicacy of their comick writers; and of the breeding and literature of individual men from their turn of humour, from their favourite jokes

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 270—275.

and stories, and from the very sound, duration and frequency, of their laughter.

The conversation of the common people, though not so smooth, nor so pleasing, as that of the better sort, has more of the wildness and strong expression of nature. The common people speak and look what they think, bluster and threaten when they are angry, affect no sympathies which they do not feel, and when offended are at no pains to conceal their dissatisfaction. They laugh when they perceive any thing ludicrous, without much deference to the sentiments of their company; and, having little relish for delicate humour, because they have been but little used to it, they amuse themselves with such pleasantry as in the higher ranks of life would offend by its homeliness. Yet it may be ludicrous notwithstanding: as those passions in a clown or savage may be natural, which in the polite world men are very careful to suppress.

IV. Tropes and figures introduce into serious writing a variety of disproportionate images; which however do not provoke laughter, when they are so contrived as to raise some other emotion of greater authority. To illustrate this by examples taken from every species of trope and figure, is not necessary, and would be tedious. I shall confine my remarks to the similitude or

comparison; which is a very common figure, and contributes, more perhaps, than any other, to render language emphatical, picturesque and affecting to the fancy.

Every similitude implies two things: the idea to be illustrated, which I call the *principal idea*; and the object alluded to, for the purpose of illustration. Now if between these two there be a considerable inequality; if the one be mean and the other dignified, or if the one be of much greater dignity than the other; there may be reason to apprehend (supposing our theory just) that, by their appearing in one assemblage, a mixture of relation and contrariety may be produced, sufficient to render the comparison ludicrous; of relation, arising from the likeness; of contrariety, arising from the disproportion. And that this is often the case, we have seen already. But when Homer compares a great army to a flight of cranes, Hector to a rock, Ajax to an ass, and Ulysses covered with leaves to a bit of live coal raked up among embers, the similitudes, for all their incongruity, are quite serious; at least they convey no risible impression to a reader of taste, when perusing the poem. By attending a little to this matter we shall perhaps be able to throw new light on our argument.

Similitudes, ranged according to their connec-

tion with the present subject, are distinguishable into three classes. 1. One sublime or dignified object may be likened to another that is more sublime, or more dignified. 2. An object comparatively mean may be likened to one that is sublime. 3. An object comparatively sublime may be likened to one that is mean.

1. If one great or dignified object is likened to another that is greater or more dignified, as when Homer compares Achilles in arms to the moon, to a comet, to the sun, and to a god,* our admiration is evidently heightened, and the principal idea improved, by the comparison. But that which we greatly admire we seldom laugh at in any circumstances, and perhaps never, when, together with admiration, it infuses into the soul that sweet and elevating astonishment which attends the perception of those objects or ideas that we denominate sublime. The emotion inspired by the view of sublimity is also in itself more powerful than that which gives rise to laughter; at least in all minds that are not weak by nature, nor depraved by habit. No person of a sound mind ever laughed the first time he raised his eyes to contemplate the inside of St. Paul's cupola: nor, in performing any of the solemn offices of his function, would a judge, a magistrate, or a clergyman, be

* Iliad, xix.

excused, if he were to give way to laughter. In vain would he plead, that his mind was at that moment struck with a ludicrous conceit, or with the recollection of a merry story: we should say, that thoughts of a higher nature *ought* to have restrained him; an idea which would not occur to us, if we were not conscious of the natural subordination of the risible propensity. An object not absolutely mean is rendered sublime in some degree, by association with a sublime idea. A *Pibroch*,* which in every other country would appear a jumble of unmeaning sounds, may communicate sublime impressions to a highlander of Scotland; not so much because he understands its modulation, as because it conveys to his mind

* A *Pibroch* is a species of tune peculiar, I think, to the highlands and western isles of Scotland. It is performed on a bagpipe, and differs totally from all other musick. Its rhythm is so irregular, and its notes especially in the quick movement, so mixed and huddled together, that a stranger finds it almost impossible to reconcile his ear to it, so as to perceive its modulation. Some of these pibrochs, being intended to represent a battle, begin with a grave motion resembling a march; then gradually quicken into the onset; run off with noisy confusion, and turbulent rapidity, to imitate the conflict and pursuit; then swell into a few flourishes of triumphant joy; and perhaps close with the wild and slow wallings of a funeral procession.

the elevating ideas of danger, and courage, and armies, and military service. And let me take this opportunity to observe, that, in like manner, a thing not ludicrous in itself may occasion laughter, when it conveys to the mind any ludicrous idea related to it by custom, or by any other associating principle. It can hardly be said, that the braying of an ass is in itself more ludicrous (though perhaps it may be more dissonant) than the neigh of a horse; yet one may be inclined to smile when one hears it, by its bringing to mind the other qualities of that sluggish animal, with which the wags of both ancient and modern times have often made themselves merry. And hence it is, that men of lively fancy, especially if they have been accustomed to attend to the laughable side of things, are apt to smile at that in which others neither perceive nor can imagine any thing ridiculous.

2. An object comparatively mean is often likened to one that is sublime; in which case it may require great address in the poet to maintain the majesty of epick or didactick composition. Similitudes of this kind, if very disproportionate, are not to be hazarded, while the principal idea retains its primitive meanness. The poet must first employ all his powers of harmony and language, to adorn and dignify it, by interesting the

affections of his reader: a branch of the poetick art, which, as I have elsewhere observed,* is universal in its application, and may give life and pathos to mere descriptions of external nature, as well as to the most sublime effort of the epick or tragick muse.

In the art of conferring dignity upon objects comparatively mean, Virgil excels all poets whatever. By a tenderness of sentiment irresistibly captivating; by a perpetual series of the most pleasing, picturesque, and romantick imagery; by the most affecting digressions; and by a propriety, beauty, and sweetness of language peculiar to himself, and unattainable by all others, he makes his way to the heart of his readers, whatever be the subject: and so prepares them for allusions and similitudes, which in the hand of an ordinary poet might appear even ridiculously inadequate; but which, by his management, give an air of grandeur to the meanest things described in his divine Georgick. The very mouse that undermines the threshing-floor, he renders an animal of importance. For his bees we are interested, as for a commonwealth of reasonable creatures. He compares them in one place to the cyclops forging thunder. Yet, inadequate and even

* Essay on Poetry and Musick, part 1. chap. 3.

ludicrous as the comparison must appear when it is thus mentioned, it has no such effect as it appears in the poem. The reader is already so prepossessed and elevated with those ideas of dignity that adorn the subject, that he is more disposed to admire, than to laugh or cavil.

Mr. John Philips had a happy talent in the mock heroick, but was not equally fortunate in serious poetry. In his *Cyder*, he endeavours, in imitation of Virgil, to raise the subject by sublime allusions; but is apt to bring them in too abruptly, and before he has given sufficient importance to the principal idea. Nor has he any pretensions to that sweetness and melody of style, which intoxicate the readers of the Mantuan poet, and prepare them for any impression he is pleased to convey. And hence the language of Philips often takes the appearance of bombast; and some of his comparisons, instead of raising admiration by their greatness, tend rather to provoke a smile by their incongruity.

The apple's outward form
Delectable the witless swain beguiles,
Till, with a writhen mouth and spattering noise,
He tastes the bitter morsel, and rejects
Disrelish'd. Not with less surprise, than when
Embattled troops with flowing banners pass.
Through flowery meads delighted, nor distrust

The smiling surface; whilst the cavern'd ground,
 With grain incentive stored, by sudden blaze
 Bursts fatal, and involves the hopes of war
 In fiery whirls; full of victorious thoughts,
 Torn and dismember'd, they aloft expire.

Had Virgil been to dignify this surprise by a magnificent allusion, he would not have degraded the principal idea by low images, (like those signified by the words *writhen mouth** and *splattering noise*); but would have employed all his art to raise it to such elevation as might make the disproportionate greatness of the object alluded to less observable.† Thomson has imitated Virgil's manner with much better skill, in that

* This very *writhen mouth* seems to be an allusion to Virgil:

At sapor indicium faciet manifestus, et ora
 Tristia tentantum sensu torquebit amaror.

Georg. ii. 247.

but it is to a part of Virgil, where simplicity is more studied than elevation.

† In the third Georgick, Virgil, speaking of the method of training steers to the plough and wagon, is at pains to dignify the subject by elegant language; but his figures are apposite, and not at all too lofty for the occasion:

Tu quos ad studium atque usum formabis agrestem
 Jam vitulos hortare, viamque insiste domandi,

beautiful passage of his Autumn,* too long for a quotation, where he compares a hive of bees suffocated with brimstone to a city swallowed up by an earthquake.

In the mock epick, where ridicule is often raised by exaggerating similitudes, care is taken to introduce the pompous comparison while the principal idea appears in all its native insignificance; and sometimes the ridicule is heightened by a dash of bombast, or by a trifling circumstance unexpectedly introduced in the middle of affected solemnity.

But, in judging of similitudes in all serious writing it is necessary to attend to the point of likeness on which the comparison turns: for two things may resemble each other in one particular, which in all others are very unlike; and there-

Dum faciles animi juvenum, dum mobilis ætas, &c.

Vers. 163.

Dryden, in his translation, wants to rise to higher elegance by means of bolder figures, which, however, being ill chosen and ill prepared, give a ludicrous air to the whole passage. He speaks of *sending the calf to school*, of forming his mind with *moral precepts*, and instructing him in husbandry, before he is perverted by *bad example*.

* Autumn, vers. 1170.

fore a similitude may, to an inattentive reader, appear incongruous, which is really proper and adequate. Those critics who blame Virgil for the simile of the cyclops above mentioned, would do well to consider, that, though there be no resemblance between a bee and a huge one eyed giant, in the size and frame of their bodies, and as little between their respective employments and manufactures, there may, however, be a resemblance between them in other things. The cyclops are eager to have the thunderbolt forged; the bees may be as eager in their way to fill their cells with honey: the art of thunder making employs a number of hands, each of whom has his particular department; and this also holds true of bees employed in the business of the hive. Now it is on account of their similitarity in these two respects,* that the poet compares them; and in these two respects they certainly may be compared. But I allow, that, in serious writing, a similitude of this kind ought not to be attempted, but by an author of the very first rank; and therefore, though I vindicate Virgil, I think it extremely hazardous to imitate him. And I am aware of the truth of part of the following remark of Pope, which I quote at length, (though some expressions in it

* See Virg. Geor. iv. 176.

do not perfectly coincide with the foregoing reasonings), because it seems to me to throw light on the present subject. "The use of the grand style on little subjects is not only ludicrous, but a sort of transgression against the rules of proportion and mechanicks; it is using a vast force to lift a feather. I believe it will be found a just observation, that the low actions of life cannot be put into a figurative style without being ridiculous: but things natural can. Metaphors raise the latter into dignity, as we see in the Georgicks; but throw the former into ridicule, as in the Lutrin. I think this may very well be accounted for: laughter implies censure; inanimate and irrational beings are not objects of censure; and therefore they may be elevated as much as you please, and no ridicule follows: but when rational beings are represented above their real character, it becomes ridiculous in art, because it is vitious in morality. The bees in Virgil, were they rational beings, would be ridiculous by having their actions and manners represented on a level with creatures so superior as men; since it would imply folly or pride, which are the proper objects of ridicule."*

3. A similitude may imply an incongruous as-

*Pope's Postscript to the Odyssey.

semblage, when an object comparatively sublime is likened to one that is mean. Homer and Virgil compare heroes, not only to beasts, but even to things inanimate, without raising a smile by the contrast. And the reason, as given already, is, that in these similitudes there is something which either takes off our attention from the incongruity, or raises within us an emotion more powerful than this of laughter.

First, the quality that occasions the comparison may be in both objects so adequate, so similar, and so striking, as to take off our attention from the incongruity of the assemblage, or even to remove from the comparison, when attentively considered, every incongruous appearance. Had Homer likened Paris to a horse, because he was goodnatured and docile; Ajax to an ass, because he was dull; and Achilles to a lion, because of his long yellow hair; the allusions would probably have been ludicrous. But he likens Paris to a pampered horse,* because of his wantonness, swiftness, and luxurious life; Ajax to an ass,† because he is said to have been as much superiour to the assault of the Trojans, as that animal is to the blows of children; and Achilles to a lion,‡ on account of his strength, fierceness, and impetu-

* Iliad, vi.

† Ibid. xi.

‡ Ibid. xx.

osity. Hector he compares 'to a rock tumbling from the top of a mountain,* because while he moved he was irresistible, and when he stopped immovable; qualities not more conspicuous in the hero, than in the stone. Milton likens Satan to a whale;† not because the one spouts salt water, as the other is vulgarly supposed to breathe out sulphureous fire, but because of his enormous size: and, to lessen the incongruity, if any should be supposed to remain, the poet is at great pains to raise our idea of the whale's magnitude:

/ Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam
The pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind,
Moors by his side.

But, secondly, it may happen, even in the higher poetry, that the compared qualities shall present an incongruous association, to the disadvantage of the principal idea. In this case, as there is an opposition, of greatness in the principal idea, and meanness in the object alluded to, it will be somewhat difficult to maintain true epic dignity. It may, however, be done, by blending with the description of the mean object some interesting circumstance, to take off the attention

* Iliad. xiii.

† Par. Lost, book 1.

from the incongruity, and fix it on something important or serious. Ulysses, going to sleep, covered over with leaves, after swimming out naked from a shipwreck, is compared by Homer to a bit of live coal preserved by a peasant in a heap of embers:

As some poor peasant, fated to reside
Remote from neighbours, in a forest wide,
Studious to save what human wants require,
In embers heap'd preserves the seeds of fire;
Hid in dry foliage thus Ulysses lies,
Till Pallas pour'd soft slumber on his eyes.*

This simile, when we attend to the point of likeness, will be found to have sufficient propriety; the resemblance being obvious, between a man almost deprived of life, and a brand almost extinguished; between the foliage that defends Ulysses from cold, and probably from death, during the night, and the embers that keep alive the seeds of fire: yet if dressed up by a genius like Butler, it might assume a ludicrous appearance, from the disproportionate nature of the things compared. But Homer, with great delicacy, draws off the reader's attention to the peasant's solitary dwelling on the extremity of a frontier, where he had no neighbours to assist him in renewing his fire,

* Odyss. lib. 5.

if by any accident it should go out. The poet is less delicate on another occasion, when he likens the same hero, tossing in his bed, and sleepless through desire to be avenged on the plunderers of his household, to a man employed "in broiling
"on a great fire a stomach full of fat and blood,
"and often turning it, because he is impatient
"to have it roasted."* This image is displeasing and despicable; and the comparison must appear ridiculous to a modern reader: though Boileau pleads, that the viand here mentioned was esteemed a great delicacy by the ancients; though Eustathius seems to think, that a low similitude might in this place very well suit the beggarly condition of Ulysses; and though, in the opinion of Mons. Dacier, the bag stuffed with fat and blood might, in Homer's days, convey a religious, and consequently an important, idea.

When the object alluded to is pleasing in itself, and the description elegant, we are apt to overlook the incongruity of a similitude, even where the disproportion is very great; the ludicrous emotion being as it were suppressed by our admiration of the poetry, or the littleness of the object compensated by its beauty. That famous passage in Virgil, where Amata, roaming up and

* Odyss. xx.

down, from the agitation of her mind, and the impulse of a demon, is compared to a top whipped about by boys, has been called fustian by some criticks, and burlesque by others.* In my

* Demetrius Phalereus observes, that "Elegance of language, by exciting admiration, makes the ridiculous disappear;" and adds, "that to express a ludicrous sentiment in fine language is like dressing an ape in fine clothes. The words of Sappho, (continues he), when beauty is her theme, are sweet and beautiful; as in her poems on Love, on Air, and on the Halcyon. Indeed all the beauties of language, and some of them of her own invention, are interwoven with Sappho's poetry. But the Rustick Bridegroom, and the Porter at the Wedding, she has ridiculed in a different style; using very mean expressions, and a choice of words less suitable to poetry than to prose." *Demet. Phal.* § 166, 167, 168 An ape dressed in fine clothes does not cease to be ludicrous: and in the mock heroick poem, where the subject is contemptible or mean, great elegance, or even magnificence, of diction, may heighten the ridicule; of which, the *Lutrin*, the *Dunciad*, the *Rape of the Lock*, and the *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, abound in examples. But it is probable, that Demetrius is here speaking of *burlesque*, and that Sappho's poem on the wedding was of that character; something perhaps resembling the ballad, said to be written by James I. king of Scotland, and commonly known by the name of *Christ's Kirk on the Green*. And it is true, that in *burlesque* writing, as distinguished from the *mock heroick*, vulgarity of expression is almost indispensable. See above, chap. 2. sect. iv. 9. 10. 11.

opinion it is neither. The propriety in point of likeness is undeniable. The object alluded to, though in itself void of dignity, is however pleasing; and receives elevation from the poetry, which is finished in Virgil's best manner, and is indeed highly picturesque and very beautiful.*

What has been said on the subject of similitudes, when applied to the present purpose, amounts to this: "Incongruity does not appear "ludicrous, when it is so qualified, or circum-
"stanced, as to raise in the mind some emotion
"more powerful than that of laughter."

V. If then, it be asked, *what is that quality in things, which makes them provoke that pleasing emotion or sentiment whereof laughter is the external sign?* I answer, *it is an uncommon mixture of relation and contrariety, exhibited, or supposed to be united, in the same assemblage.* If, again it be asked, *whether such a mixture will always provoke laughter?* my answer is, *it will always, or for the most part, excite the risible emotion, unless*

* Ceu quondam torto volitans sub verbere turbo,
Quem pueri magno in gyro vacua atria circum,
Intenti ludo exercent; ille actus habena
Curvatis fertur spatiis: stupet inscia supra
Impubesque manus, mirata volubile buxum.
Dant animos plagæ, &c.

when the perception of it is attended with some other emotion of greater authority.

It cannot be expected, that I should give a complete list of those emotions that do commonly, in a sound mind, bear down this ludicrous emotion. Several of them have been specified in the course of this inquiry. We have seen, from the examples given, that moral disapprobation, pity, fear, disgust, admiration, are among the number; to which every person, who attends to what passes in his own mind, may perhaps be able to add several others.

I am well aware, that the comparative strength of our several emotions is not the same in each individual. In some the more serious affections are so prevalent, that the risible disposition operates but seldom, and with a feeble impulse: in some, the latter predominates so much that the others are scarce able to counteract its energy. It is hardly possible to arrive at principles so comprehensive as to include the peculiarities of every individual. These are sometimes so inconsistent with the general law of the species, that they may be considered as deviations from the ordinary course of nature. In tracing *Sentimental Laughter* to its first principles, I have examined it, only as it is found to operate, for the most part, in the generality of mankind.

CHAPTER IV.

An Attempt to account for the Superiority of the Moderns in Ludicrous Writing.

IT seems to be generally acknowledged, that the moderns are superiour to the ancient Greeks and Romans, in every sort of ludicrous writing. If this be indeed the case, it is a fact that deserves the attention of those authors who make wit, or humour, the subject of their inquiry; since the same reasonings that account for this fact must throw light on the philosophy of laughter. But by those people who argue for argument's sake, probable reasons might be urged, to show, that we are not competent judges of the ancient humour, and therefore cannot be certain of the superiority of the modern. Were I to defend this side of the question, the following should be my arguments.

Every thing that gives variety to the thoughts, the manners, and employments of men, must also tend to diversify their conversations and compositions in general, and their wit and humour in particular. Accordingly we find, that

almost every profession in life has a turn of humour, as well as of thinking and acting, peculiar in some degree to itself. The soldier, the seaman, the mechanick, the husbandman, is more amused by the conversation of people of his own trade, than by that of others: and a species of wit shall be highly relished in one club or society, which in another would be but little attended to. We need not wonder, then, that in the humour of each country there should be some peculiar character, to the forming of which, not only the language and manners, but even the climate and soil, must contribute, by giving a peculiar direction to the pursuits and thoughts of the inhabitants. Nor need we wonder, that each nation should be affected most agreeably with its own wit and humour. For, not to mention the prejudice that one naturally entertains in favour of what is one's own, a native must always understand better than foreigners can, the relations, contrarieties, and allusions, implied in what is ludicrous in the speech and writings of his countrymen.

Shakspeare's humour will never be adequately relished in France, nor that of Moliere in England: and translations of ludicrous writings are seldom popular, unless they exhibit something of the manners and habits of thinking, as well as

the language, of the people to whom they are addressed. Echard's Terence, from having adopted such a multitude of our cant phrases, and proverbial allusions, is perhaps more generally relished in Great Britain, than a more literal and more elegant version would have been. Sancho Pancha diverts us more in Morteux's Don Quixote, than in Jervas's translation, or Smollet's; because he has more of the English clown, and less of the Spaniard, in the former, than in the latter. And a certain French author, to render his translation of Tom Jones more acceptable to his countrymen, and to clear it of what he foolishly calls English phlegm, has greatly abridged that incomparable performance, and, in my opinion, expunged some of the finest passages; those conversasion pieces, I mean, which tend more immediately to the elucidation of the characters, than to the progress of the story.

May there not, then, in ancient authors, be many excellent strokes of wit and humour, which we misapprehend, merely because we cannot adequately relish? The dialogues of the Socratick philosophers abound in pleasantry, which is no doubt entertaining to a modern reader, but which does not at all come up to those expectations that one would be apt to form of it from the high encomiums of Cicero, and other ancients criticks: and may not this be partly imputed to our not

sufficiently understanding the Socratick dialogues? To us nothing appears more paltry in the execution, than the ridicule with which Aristophanes persecuted Socrates: and yet we know, that it operated with wonderful energy on the Athenians, who, for refinement of taste, and for wit and humour, were distinguished among all the nations of antiquity. Does not this amount to a presumption, that we are not competent judges of the humour of that profligate comedian?

Let it be remarked, too, that the sphere most favourable to wit and humour is that which is occupied by the middle and lower ranks of mankind; persons in high stations being obliged to maintain a reserve unfriendly to risible emotion, and to reduce their behaviour to an artificial uniformity, which does indeed answer many important purposes, but which, for the most part, disqualifies them for filling any eminent place in humorous description. Now we are much in the dark in regard to the manners that prevailed among the Greeks and Romans of the lower sort: and there must have been, in their ludicrous writings, as there are in ours, many nice allusions to trifling customs, to the news of the day, and to characters and incidents too inconsiderable to be minded by the historian, which none but persons living at the time, and in a particu-

lar place, could ever comprehend; as the writers of those days had no notion of the modern practice of illustrating their own works with marginal annotations. Many authors, too, are lost; and with them has probably perished (as we remarked already) the ludicrous effect of innumerable parodies and turns of expression, to be met with in Aristophanes, Plautus, Lucian, Horace, and other witty ancients. It is at least certain, that there are in Shakspeare many parodies and allusions, the propriety of which we cannot estimate, as the authors, customs, and incidents, referred to, are already forgotten.

From the causes now hinted at, works of wit and humour would appear to be less permanent in their effects and more liable to become obscure, than any other literary compositions. Commentaries are now necessary to make *Hudibras* and the *Dunciad* thoroughly intelligible: and what a mysterious rhapsody would the *Rape of the Lock* be to those, who, though well instructed in the language of Hooker and Spenser, had never heard of snuff or coffee, watches or hoop petticoats, beaus or lap dogs, toiletts or card tables! But the reasonings of Euclid and Demosthenes, the moral and natural paintings of Homer and Virgil, the pathos of *Eloisa's Epistle to Abelard*, the descriptions of Livy and Tacitus, can never

stand in need of commentaries to explain them, so long as the Greek, Latin, and English languages are tolerably understood; because they are founded in those suggestions of human reason, and those appearances in the moral and material world, which are always the same, and with which every intelligent observer must in every age be acquainted.

I would not insinuate, that all sorts of ludicrous writing are equally liable to lose their effect, and be misunderstood. Those must preserve their relish unimpaired through ages, which allude to our more permanent follies and absurdities; like Horace's picture of an intrusive coxcomb, and the greater part of the satire which he levels at pedantry and avarice; or to writings transcendently excellent; like the Virgilian Cento of Ausonius, the Splendid Shilling of Philips, and the *Batrachomyomachia* erroneously ascribed to Homer; or to customs or opinions universally known; such as Lucian's ridicule of the pagan theology, and that inimitable raillery on the abuses of learning which is contained in the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. I mean only to say, that ludicrous writing in general is extremely subject to the injuries of time; and that, therefore, the wit and humour of the ancient Greeks and Romans might have

been far more exquisite, than we at present have any positive reason to believe.

Such would be my plan of declamation, if I were to controvert the common opinion of our superiority to the ancients in ludicrous writing. But I am not anxious to dispute this point; being satisfied, that the common opinion is true; and that, considering the advantages in this respect which the moderns enjoy, the case cannot well be otherwise.

Modern ridicule, compared with the ancient, will be found to be, first, *more copious*, and secondly, *more refined*.

1. The superiour **COPIOUSNESS** of the former may be accounted for, if we can show, that to us many sources of wit and humour are both open and obvious, which to the ancients were utterly unknown. It is indeed reasonable to suppose, that they may have been acquainted with many ludicrous objects, whereof we are ignorant; but that we must be acquainted with many more, of which they were ignorant, will hardly be questioned by those who admit, that laughter arises from incongruous and unexpected combinations of ideas; and that our fund of ideas is more ample and more diversified than that of the Greeks and Romans, because our knowledge is more extensive both of men and of things. Far be it

from me to undervalue the attainments of that illustrious part of the human race. The Greeks and Romans are our masters in all polite learning; and their knowledge is to ours, what the foundation is to a superstructure. Our superiority, where we have any, is the consequence of our being posterior in time, and enjoying the benefit of their discoveries and example, as well as the fruits of our own industry. At any rate, the superiority I now contend for is such as the warmest admirer of the ancients may admit, without disrespect to their memory, or injury to their reputation.

To compare the late acquisitions in knowledge with the ancient discoveries, would far exceed the bounds of a short essay, and is not necessary at present. All I mean to do, is to make a few brief remarks on the subject, with a view to account for the superiour *copiousness* of modern ridicule.

That in most branches of philosophy, and natural history, the moderns have greatly the advantage of the ancients, is undeniable. Hence we derive an endless multitude of notions and ideas unknown to antiquity, which, by being differently combined and compared, give rise to innumerable varieties of that species of ludicrous association which is called wit. Every addition to litera-

ture enlarges the sphere of wit, by supplying new images, and new opportunities of tracing out unexpected similitude: nor would the author of *Hudibras* have excelled so much in this talent, if he had not been distinguished by uncommon acquisitions in learning, as well as by a singular turn of fancy. One cannot read a canto of his extraordinary poem, without discovering his ability in both these respects; or a page, without being struck with some jocular allusion, which could not have occurred to the wits of Greece or Rome, because it depends on ideas with which they were unacquainted.

The moderns are also better instructed in all the varieties of human manners. They know what the ancients were, and what they themselves are; and their improvements in commerce, geography, and navigation, have wonderfully extended their knowledge of mankind within the two last centuries. They have seen, by the light of history, the greatest and politest nations gradually swallowed up in the abyss of barbarism, and again by slow degrees emerging from it. Their policy and spirit of adventure have made them well acquainted with many nations whose very existence was anciently unknown; and it is now easier to sail round the globe, than it then was to explore the coasts of the Mediterranean sea. Hence,

I shall not say that we have acquired any superior knowledge of those faculties essential to human nature, which constitute the foundation of moral science: but hence it is clear, that we derive a very great variety of those ideas of the characters and circumstances of mankind, which by their different arrangements and colourings, form that species of ludicrous combination which is called humour.

To be somewhat more particular: Certain forms of government are familiar to the moderns, of which the ancients knew almost nothing. I mention only the feudal system; the influence whereof has in latter times wrought so amazing a change on the affairs and manners of Europe. Other invaders have satisfied themselves with introducing their laws and customs gradually into a conquered province: but the subverters of the Roman empire, all at once, with a rapidity equal to that wherewith they marched and fought, gave new forms to society, new analogies to language, and a new direction to the thoughts and passions of men. Ideas of political subordination, such as had never occurred to the most fanciful projectors of Greece and Rome, now took possession of the human mind, and obliterated all the philosophy of the ancient republican. One of the most immediate effects of this system was,

to make a separation between the different orders of men, and to subject human intercourse to the rules of a more complex economy: this would be the natural consequence of instituting the several gradations of vassalage, and annexing high prerogatives to the condition of a superiour. In a republick, the citizens must often meet together upon the footing of equality and mutual independence; and, having nearly the same purposes in view, and enjoying the same privileges, will contract similar habits of thinking, and be animated with similar passions, and marked with a sameness of character, or at least of external deportment. In a despotick empire, where all the subjects are equally insignificant and hopeless, and where to remain undistinguished is the best and almost the only security, picturesque diversities of genius and disposition are still less to be expected. But in a feudal state, where the primitive spirit of freedom predominates, the orders of men, on account of their vast inequality, must form themselves into separate societies, which, while their respective privileges and pretensions keep them active, mutual jealousy or ambition will prompt to make a figure, each in its own particular sphere, and by means peculiar to itself. It has been remarked, that varieties of character are more perceptible in England, than in other

countries: and I submit to the reader, whether this may not be accounted for, on the principles here specified. Were the country gentlemen of England to live in towns, or to meet frequently in a common *forum*, or in any other way to form one large society, their peculiarities would disappear, and their behaviour (like that of citizens in a republick) would become externally uniform, or nearly so: and if they were not conscious of their own independence and privileges, they would not have the courage to think for themselves, but would probably be (like many of their neighbours) imitators of one another, or insipid followers of the fashion. Let me not be supposed to insinuate, that variety of *genius* and *temper* is peculiar to any one form of government: different characters I am sensible that there always will be, wherever there are different men: my meaning is, that the *manners* of individuals, and those outward circumstances of life that supply materials for wit and humour, are liable to be more diversified by some forms of government than by others, and by free governments of the feudal form more perhaps than by any other. The laughable peculiarities that distinguish Don Quixote, Parson Adams, Sir Roger de Coverley, Squire Western, and many other heroes of the comick romance, are such as men could not be supposed

to acquire, if they did not live secluded in some degree from the general intercourse of society. We smile, when sailors use at land the language of the sea, when learned pedants interlard ordinary discourse with Greek and Latin idioms, when coxcombs bring abroad into the world the dialect and gesticulations of their own club, and, in general, when a man expresses himself on all subjects in figures of speech suggested by what belongs to his own profession only. Now what but habits contracted in a narrow society could produce these peculiarities? And does not this prove, that ludicrous qualities are incident to men who live detached in a narrow society, and, therefore, that the feudal, or any other, form of government, that tends to keep the different orders of men separate, must be favourable to wit and humour, and so enlarge the sphere of ludicrous writing? A general acquaintance with mankind, produces a facility of doing what is conformable to general manners, and wears off those improprieties and strange habits that divert by their singularity.

But whatever account the reader may make of these reasonings, this at least he must allow, that from the feudal government arose one institution, I mean chivalry, which gave occasion to Cervantes to invent a species of writing, as fertile of hu-

mour, (and of wit, too, if Hudibras be an imitation of it) as any that ever appeared in the world. Need we wonder, then, that the modern ridicule should be more *copious* than the ancient?

Religious controversy is in modern times a never failing source of wit and humour. But in the days of Greece and Rome there was no such thing; the pagan superstitions being too absurd to admit of controversy. From this source we derive many witty passages in the writings of Chaucer, Erasmus, Pascal, and others; and it is to this we are indebted for Hudibras, and the Tale of a Tub, two of the most laughable (I wish I could say the most salutary) pieces of ridicule that ever were written. It may seem surprising, that things so serious and awful, as superstition and enthusiasm, should lie open to the attack of the wit and buffoon, as well as of the satirist. Indeed, if we estimate them by their effects in society, and their power over the human mind, they would seem worthy to be reckoned among the most tremendous phenomena in nature. And so they are, no doubt; and, for this reason, may be made the ground work of tragedy, serious satire, rhetorical invective, and other sublime compositions. But when we consider them as they are in themselves, and with a view to the causes whence they frequently arise, the arguments by which they

are supported, and the strange vagaries into which they have led rational beings, we must be struck with something ludicrous in their appearance; particularly with the vast disproportion, between their real and imaginary dignity; between their genuine effects, and those that, previously to experience, we should be inclined to expect from them. And thus it is, that superstition and enthusiasm, while they appear in the light, not of crimes, but of infirmities, may very well be made the subject of comick ridicule. But let the torch of wit be brandished against them with discretion superiour to that of the dean of St. Patrick's; lest, while it is employed to dispel the gloom, that by investing the shrine of these demons conceals their deformity, it should be permitted to dart sacrilegious fire into the neighbouring sanctuary of religion.

Gallantry (by which I here understand those generous and respectful attentions we pay to the fair sex) contributes in many ways both to the *copiousness* and to the *refinement* of wit and humour. Nor is there evidence, that this mode of politeness at all subsisted in Greece or Rome, at least in its present form. There, the women, secluded from general conversation, were known only by their domestick virtues, or by crimes that exposed them to publick abhorrence; while the

nicer discriminations of the female character, which supply materials for comick writing, were little attended to: nor could they, in that sequestered condition, ever arrive at those improvements in taste, address, and delicacy, which may be communicated by modern education, and which in a modern youth may excite a purer and more interesting attachment than ever animated a Greek or Roman lover. In fact, there is nothing in modern manners more characteristical than this gallantry, and few things that would surprise an ancient more. It bespeaks, on the part of the men, a mixture of tenderness and respect, of deference and esteem, which the politest gallant of antiquity never thought of; and of familiarity and reserve, confidence and caution, on the part of the women, which the Greek and Roman ladies, confined to the society of their own sex, and intimidated by a rigorous economy that rendered their state little better than servitude, could have neither inclination nor opportunity to acquire.

The old Germans, (as we learn from Tacitus)* and those warriors of the north who inva-

* Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum*.—Thucydides was of opinion, that she is the best woman, of whom there is least speech, either to her praise or dispraise; and that the name of a lady of honour ought always, like

ded the Roman empire, were on all occasions attended by their women; whom, if they did not love with romantick fondness, they esteemed for their friendly counsels and faithful service, and sometimes considered as oracles, by whom the gods gave intimation of future events.† But in the more

her body, to be kept at home, and never permitted to go abroad. This doctrine, which conveys no comfortable idea of the Grecian economy in regard to the fair sex, is warmly controverted by the gallant and goodnatured Plutarch; who, in his treatise of the virtues of women, contends, “that virtue always deserves honour wherever it is found, but especially when it is the work of a feeble agent; and that, therefore, female virtue is peculiarly worthy of praise, that not only their own sex, but men also, may profit by the example.” Many female characters of high virtue are indeed celebrated by ancient historians and poets; and innumerable testimonies in their favour might be cited from the Greek and Roman authors. Yet still the general treatment of women at Rome, but especially in Greece, was such as we should not scruple to call tyrannical and cruel; as partaking much of the Asiatick severity, little of the Gothick and German confidence, and nothing at all of the liberality, gentleness, and affectionate homage, of modern gallantry.

† I know not, whether it proceeded from the respect the northern nations paid their women, or to what other cause it was owing; but it is surely very singular, and what, on Mr. Harris’s principles (see *Hermes*, p. 45.), could not be easily accounted for, that in the Saxon and

genial regions of Asia, the sexes lived on a very different footing. Without a grain of esteem on either side, the men regarded the women with sentiments of untender, though passionate love; and the women, secluded from publick view, and cut off from the means of rational improvement, were insipid and submissive, as slaves must be under the rod of tyranny. Modern gallantry comprehends every thing that is agreeable in these two modes of domestick intercourse; avoiding the slavish and unmanly principles of the latter, and whatever savours of rashness in the former. With all due regard to external charms, it is still more sensible of moral and intellectual beauty; and while it favours the enthusiasm, and disavows the jealousy, of the enamoured Asiatick, it exalts and refines those sentiments of rational esteem which we inherit from our free born ancestors of the north. In a word, the superiority, vested by law in the male sex, is now amply compensated to the female, by that tender complaisance, with which they are treated in all polite nations; and which, from the use they make of it in improving society, and enlivening conversation, it appears that they so justly deserve.

some other northern languages, the sun should be of the feminine gender, and the moon masculine. See Hickee's Thesaurus.

Is it not obvious, that this gallantry tends to enlarge the sphere of comick writing? By admitting us to the conversation of the fair sex, it brings us acquainted with an entire class of characters, wherein, though we must discern every sort of human excellence, we may also trace out (since nothing sublunary is perfect) a variety of those little faults and absurdities, which Aristotle, had he known them, would have allowed to be fit objects of comick ridicule. But neither Aristotle, nor any other ancient, can vie with the moderns, in knowledge of the female character. We see nothing of it, or next to nothing, in the comedies or satires of Greece and Rome. Whereas, in the writings of Fielding, Young, Pope, and Shakspeare, not to mention the French and Italian authors, the freaks and foibles of the female world supply a rich fund of humorous entertainment.

Further: Considering the form of intercourse now subsisting between the sexes, so different from that which anciently prevailed, and their different pursuits and accomplishments thence resulting; is there not reason to suppose, that the passions wherewith they inspire each other should also be different? Romantick love seems to be almost peculiar to the latter ages. This passion may perhaps be traced up to that spirit of courtesy and adventure which arose from circumstances

peculiar to feudal government, distinguished all the institutions of chivalry, gave birth and form to the old romance, and consequently to the new, and to this day influences in a perceptible degree the customs and manners of Europe. More delicate and more generous than the Greek or Roman loves, this passion is also more interesting, and may of course be presumed to be more powerful. Shakspeare, and the author of Robinson Crusoe, have indeed shown, that even in modern times this passion is not essential, either in tragedy or in romance, to form an affecting fable: but the generality of late writers, if we may judge of their opinions by their practice, seem to think otherwise; and that to every sort of fictitious narrative, from an epick poem to a pastoral, from Amadis de Gaul to the last published novel, a love story is as ornamental and necessary, as leaves to a tree, or a mistress to a knight-errant.

As romantick love in its natural and regular procedure, is now become so copious a source of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, triumph and disappointment, we might reasonably conclude, that in its more whimsical forms and vagaries it could scarce fail to supply materials for laughter. And that this is the case, nobody in the least acquainted with modern life or modern literature needs be informed. I mention not its laughable extravagancies, as they appear in Don Quixote,

sir Roger de Coverly, and other heroes on record: and far be it from me to specify on this occasion any of the various forms of female prudery and coquetry, of which I always think with the most profound reverence. But the reader would wonder at me, if I did not remark, that to affectations and follies, which I fear are imputable to this gentle passion, we owe an endless train of fops, coxcombs, beaus, male coquets, cicisbeos, and danglers; a breed of animals unknown to the ancients; and which if they were but as harmless as they are contemptible, might be allowed to rank with the most ridiculous things on the face of the earth.

Other causes for the superiour copiousness of modern ridicule I shall only hint at; as illustration is not necessary to render their effects obvious to the reader.

We have a far greater variety of authors to allude to, in the way of parody and burlesque, than the ancients had; for we have both ancient authors and modern: and to an excessive admiration of the former some late wits have ascribed the origin of a new species of ludicrous character, whereof we have several strong outlines in the travelling physician in *Peregrine Pickle*, and a finished portrait in the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. There was indeed, in the days of

Horace,* a sort of character not unlike this; a set of criticks, who despising the literary productions of their own time, were perpetually extolling the ancient Roman authors, and tracing out divine beauties of style in writings that were become almost unintelligible. But these criticks are rather to be ranked with those of our antiquarians, who prefer Chaucer and Langland to Dryden and Milton, and like Pope's parish clerk, take a kindly affection even to the black letter in which the former are printed. The taste of such men may be singular; but as their labours are often highly useful in illustrating ancient history, it would not be possible, without violent misrepresentation, to make them so ridiculous as Pope and Arbuthnot have made the elder and younger Scriblerus.

It may also be remarked, that our customs in regard to dress change more frequently than the Greek or Roman did. Whether this be owing to our improvements in commerce, and superiour zeal for varieties in manufacture; or to a bad taste in dress, which must always be changing, because it has no fixed principle; or to the influence of the feudal manners; or to the luxuries peculiar to opulent monarchy, I do not now inquire: but a certain fact it is, that the Greek and Roman

* Hor. Epist. ad Augustum, vers. 19—27.

dresses were in a great degree permanent, while ours are liable to endless variety and alteration. A circumstance this, that may at first view seem unconnected with the present subject; but to which the admirers of the Rape of the Lock, Spectator, and Tatler, are indebted for some of the finest humour that ever was written.

Commerce, and all the arts connected with it, are more successfully cultivated by modern, than they were by ancient nations. Hence a variety of new employments, which, by dividing mankind into separate professions and societies, multiply human characters, and enlarge the sphere of humour. And hence, as was observed, an infinite number of new objects and ideas, that extend the bounds of wit, by suggesting new sources of comparison, and ludicrous arrangement. The art of printing, too, by diffusing literature, has made the characters of mankind better known, and raised up a greater variety of authors, whose different pursuits and adventures yield materials for that mode of ludicrous writing, in which the Dunciad may be considered as the most capital performance.

To a full examination of the present topic, it would be further necessary, to give a critical analysis of our most celebrated works in wit and humour, and of the human characters displayed in them; and to inquire, from what external

causes the laughable peculiarities in each character arise; and how far the same or similar causes could take place in ancient times. But this I leave as a theme to amuse the leisure of future criticks; and shall conclude with a remark or two on the superiour REFINEMENT of modern ridicule.

II. If modern ridicule be more *copious* than the ancient, of which there seems to be sufficient proof, it must also, according to the natural progress of things, be more *refined*. For, as was hinted already, the more conversant we are among pleasurable objects of any particular class, the more sagacious we become in estimating their comparative excellence, and our taste of course becomes more delicate. When a savage or clown sees a picture for the first time, his wonder is raised to the highest pitch, even though the merit of the piece be but small: he never beheld any thing so admirable; he can conceive nothing beyond it. Make him gradually acquainted with a number of pictures, and engage him to fix his attention upon each, and you shall see him of his own accord begin to form comparisons; to discover beauties in one, which are not in another, or not in the same degree; and at last, perhaps, to find out imperfections in the best, and to conceive something in the art still better than he has ever seen. Homely jokes delight the vul-

gar, because their knowledge of ludicrous combination is limited. Let this knowledge be extended; let them hear varieties of conversation, or read the works of witty authors, and their taste will improve of itself: and those jokes will at length appear despicable, which formerly they mistook for excellent. That the humour of Addison and Pope should be more refined than that of Lucian and Horace, that Swift should be more delicate than Rabelais, and Foote than Aristophanes, is therefore not more surprising, than that the man of observation, who has made the tour of Europe, should be a better judge of elegance in building and furniture, than he who has never travelled beyond the frontier of his native province.

But, if this progress towards perfection of taste hold universally, why, it may be said, do not we excel the ancients in our taste of books and writing in general; since it is plain, that in this respect also we have more experience than they? I answer: If all the books we have, the new as well as old, had been written in a good taste, and we as attentive readers as the ancients were, it is not absurd to suppose, that our taste in writing might have been more perfect than theirs. But we have such numbers of books to read, and so many of them trifling, and so many unskilfully written,

that we are apt to lose the habit of attentive study, and even to contract a liking to inelegant or faulty composition. For inattention long indulged settles into a habit; and the same susceptibility of nature, which in time reconciles some men to the relish of tobacco and strong liquors, may also gradually admit a depravation in the mental taste of those to whom deformity and impropriety have long been familiar. I supposed the clown, the savage, and the traveller, attentive to what they saw; and I did not suppose every thing they saw to be bad in its kind. Had every thing been bad, or they inattentive, it would have been impossible for them, in the case I mentioned, ever to acquire a taste in painting, building or furniture: and were a man never to hear any but coarse and vulgar jokes, I question whether his taste in ridicule would ever improve, though he were to hear them by hundreds and thousands every day. And therefore I admit, that the progress above mentioned, towards perfection of taste, holds, not universally, but only in certain circumstances; and that the superiour *refinement* of modern ridicule cannot be accounted for, from its superiour *copiousness*, unless we can prove it to have received cultivation from the influence of other causes peculiar to the condition of men in modern times.

And, in order to prove this, I observe, secondly, That what we call the point of honour

(though in many respects blamable) has, in conjunction with a spirit of courtesy derived from the same feudal origin, tended greatly in these latter times to check intemperate passion, and regulate human speech. And nothing, perhaps, has more effectually softened conversation, by discountenancing indelicacy, and by promoting good humour, gentle manners, and a desire to please, than the society of the fair sex; an acquisition whereof neither the sages of Greece and Rome, nor the voluptuaries of Asia, ever knew the value; and for which Europe is indebted to the refinements peculiar to modern gallantry. Nor is it only by studying to avoid whatever might be offensive to female delicacy, that we derive improvement from our amiable partners in social life. They set us an example, from which it is our own fault if we receive no benefit. The liveliness of their fancy, the purity of their taste, and the unstudied ease of their elocution, give to modern conversation an elegance and a variety, which the Socratick school itself would have been proud to take for a model.

My third remark is, that political institutions have also an effect on ludicrous writing, as on every thing else in which that political creature *man* is concerned. The mirth of a savage, when he gives way to it, is mere madness; as his sorrow approaches for the most part to despair. But

savages are little addicted to jocularity: their looks, their songs, and their musick are solemn: they are continually engrossed by emotions more powerful than this of laughter; a necessary effect of their violent temper, and of their needy and perious condition. Wit and humour, and those nicer improvements of speech that minister to pleasure rather than necessity, seldom appear among a people till publick peace be tolerably secure. And as monarchy is of all governments, the least liable to either external assault, or intestine commotion, and leaves the subject most at leisure for both private business and private amusement, it would seem of course more favourable to every species of *comick* writing, than any of the republican forms; in which important affairs and consequently important emotions, must ever be present to the soberminded citizen. And where persons of all ranks, and those ranks very different, often meet in society; and the publick welfare depends on their living on good terms with one another, each within the sphere of his own prerogative, (a state of things not to be looked for in democracy or despotism, but very compatible with limited monarchy,) politeness of behaviour must needs take place; while the great find it for their interest to please the people; and the people, to recommend themselves to the favour of the great. This general politeness, which is one

distinguishing characteristick of monarchy, and which the example of a court is alone sufficient to make fashionable, must ever be unfriendly to rudeness of speech, and must therefore refine wit and humour, while it polishes conversation. Now it is observable, that in modern times monarchy gives the law to those parts of the world that aspire to a literary character, as republican government did of old. Does not this, added to the former consideration, account in some measure for the superiour refinement of the modern wit and humour?

And now, notwithstanding the levity of many of these remarks, and the uninteresting title prefixed to them, may we not be permitted to observe in conclusion, that the meek and benevolent spirit of our religion has had a powerful influence in sweetening and refining all the comforts of human society, and conversation among the rest? That humility, gentleness, and kind affection, whereof goodbreeding ever assumes the outward form, does not christianity establish in the heart as a permanent principle of indispensable obligation? That generous love of human kind, which prompts the christian to watch for the good of others, and embrace every opportunity of promoting not only their welfare, but their virtue, taking care never to offend, and avoiding even the appearance of evil; would not the man

of taste acknowledge to be the very perfection and heroism of polite behaviour? Must not the affecting view that true religion exhibits, of all mankind bearing to one another the relation of brethren, impart keenness and activity to those tender sympathies of our social nature, whereof the language of goodbreeding is so remarkably expressive? Christianity commands, not the suppression only, but the extinction, of every indelicate thought, arrogant emotion and malevolent purpose: would conversation stand in need of any further refinement, if this law were as punctually fulfilled, as it is earnestly recommended? What is more efficacious, than habitual good humour, in rendering the intercourse of society agreeable, and in keeping at a distance all intemperate passion, and all harshness of sentiment and language? and of what religion, but the christian, can we say with truth, that it supplies, in every state of human affairs, a perpetual source of inward consolation? In a word, true christianity alone, and at once, transforms a barbarian into a man; a brutal, selfish, and melancholy savage, into a kind, a generous, and a cheerful associate.

Will it be said, that delicacy of speech and behaviour may be communicated and acquired by the means recommended in some late LETTERS, namely, by external applications, and by the use

of certain mechanical phrases, looks, and gestures? As well may the painting of the cheeks and eyebrows be prescribed as a preservative from the rheumatism, and perfumed snuff as an antidote against hunger and thirst. He has learned little of the true interests of human society, and nothing at all of the human mind, who does not know, that without sincerity there could not be either happiness or comfort upon earth; that permanent propriety of conduct has its source in the heart; and that, if all men believed one another to be knaves and hypocrites, politeness of language and attitude, instead of being graceful, would appear as ridiculous, as the chatter of a parrot, or the grin of a monkey. Who, that has the spirit of a man, could take pleasure in professions of goodwill, which he knew to be insincere? Who that is not conscious of some baseness in himself, could seriously imagine, that mankind in general might be rendered susceptible of such pleasure? I speak not now of the immorality of that new system; which if I were inclined to say of it what I think, would give deeper as well as louder tones to my language: I speak only of its absurdity and folly. And absurd and foolish in the extreme, as well as wicked, must every system be, that aims to disjoin delicacy from virtue, or virtue from religion.

Let us not imagine, because the influence of religion is not so powerful as it ought to be, that therefore it is not powerful at all. What human creatures would have been at this day, if the light of the gospel had not yet arisen upon the earth, we cannot positively tell: but were this a proper place for explaining the ground of such a conjecture, I think I could demonstrate the reasonableness of supposing, that they must have been, beyond all comparison, more wretched than they are. At a time, when it was debased by the most lamentable superstitions, religion taught courtesy and soberness to the sons of chivalry: a circumstance whereof the salutary effects are still discernible in the manners of Europe. How much greater may we presume its efficacy to be in these days, when it is taught in its purity, and may be understood by all! But infidels, it may be objected, are as eminent for polite behaviour, as believers. Granting this to be true, which however it is impossible to prove, I would only desire those, who second the objection, to consider, whether the present system of politeness arose among infidels or christians; whether it would have arisen at all, if paganism had continued to prevail; whether several of its distinguishing characters be not derived from the christian religion; whether the light of reason, unaided by

the radiance of the gospel, would have dispelled so soon that night of intellectual darkness which followed the subversion of the Roman empire: and, lastly, whether it be not prudent for a few individuals (unbelievers being still, as I trust, the smaller number in these parts of the world) to conform to the manners of the many, especially when those manners are universally felt and acknowledged to be more agreeable than any other. The influence of true religion, in humanizing society, and refining conversation, is indeed very great. And if so, I could not, consistently with my present plan, overlook it. Nor is it, in my opinion, possible for a philosopher, unless blinded by ignorance, checked by timidity, or led astray by prejudice, to enter into any inquiry relating either to morals or to manners, without paying some tribute of praise to that divine institution.



REMARKS
ON THE
UTILITY
OF
CLASSICAL LEARNING.

Written in the year 1769.

Ego multos homines excellenti animo ac virtute fuisse, et sine doctrina, naturæ ipsius habitu prope divino, per seipsos et moderatos, et graves, extitisse fateor. Etiam illud adjungo, sæpius ad laudem atque virtutem naturam sine doctrina, quam sine natura valuisse doctrinam. Atque idem ego contendo, cum ad naturam eximiam atque illustrem accesserit ratio quædam conformatioque doctrinæ, tum illud nescio quid præclarum ac singulare solere existere.—Quod si non hic tantus fructus ostenderetur, et si ex his studiis delectatio sola peteretur; tamen, ut opinor, hanc animi remissionem humanissimam ac liberatissimam judicaretis.—Hæc studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solatium præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur.

Cicero pro Archia, cap. 7.

REMARKS
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THE calumniators of the Greek and Roman learning have not been few in these latter times. Perrault, La Motte, and Terrason, arraigned the taste of the ancients; and Des Cartes and Malebranche affected to despise their philosophy. Yet it seemed to be allowed in general, that the study of the classick authors was a necessary part of polite education. This, however, has of late been not only questioned, but denied: and it has been said, that every thing worth preserving of ancient literature might be more easily transmitted, both to us and to posterity, through the channel of the modern languages, than through that of the Greek and Latin. On this subject, several slight essays have been written; the authors of which seem to think, that the human mind, being now

arrived at maturity, may safely be left to itself; and that the classick authors, those great instructors of former times, are become an incumbrance to the more sprightly genius of the present.

“ For who, that is an adept in the philosophy
“ of Locke and Newton, can have any need of
“ Aristotle? What useful precept of the Socra-
“ tick school has been overlooked by modern
“ moralists? Is not geometry as fairly, and as
“ fully displayed in the French and English
“ tongues, as in the unknown dialects of Archi-
“ medes, Apollonius, and Euclid? Why have re-
“ course to Demosthenes and Cicero, for exam-
“ ples in an art, which Massillon, Bourdaloue,
“ and the French academicians, (to say nothing
“ of the orators of our own country) have carried
“ to perfection? Are we not taught by Voltaire
“ and his editors, who, though ignorant of Greek,
“ are well read in madame Dacier’s translations,
“ that Tasso is a better poet than Homer; and
“ that the sixth and seventh cantos of the Hen-
“ riade are alone more valuable than the whole
“ Iliad? What dramatick poet of antiquity is to
“ be compared with the immortal Shakspeare?
“ what satirist with Pope, who to all the fire and
“ elevation of Juvenal, joins the wit, the taste,

* See *Le Vicende della Letteratura*, pag. 166.

“ and sententious morality, of Horace? As to
“ criticism: is there in Aristotle, Dionysius,
“ Cicero, Quintilian, or Longinus, any thing that
“ is not more philosophically explained, and bet-
“ ter illustrated by examples, in the writings of
“ Dacier, Rollin, Fenelon, Dryden, and Addison?
“ And then, how debasing to an ingenuous mind
“ is the drudgery and discipline of our publick
“ schools! That the best days of youth should be
“ embittered by confinement, amidst the gloom
“ of solitude, or under the scourge of tyranny;
“ and all for no purpose, but that the memory
“ may be loaded with the words of two languages
“ that have been dead upwards of a thousand
“ years: is it not an absurdity too gross to admit
“ of exaggeration? To see a youth of spirit hang-
“ ing over a musty folio, his cheek pale with
“ watching, his brow furrowed with untimely
“ wrinkles, his health gone, and every power of
“ the soul enervated with anxiety, and stupified
“ with poring upon trifles; what blood boils not
“ with indignation, what heart melts not with sor-
“ row! And then the pedant, just broken loose
“ from his cell, bristling all o’er with Greek, and
“ puff’d with pride, as Boileau says; his head
“ so full of words, that no room is left for ideas;
“ his accomplishments so highly prized by him-
“ self, as to be intolerable to others; ignorant of

“ the history, and untouched with the interests,
“ of his native country; what an useless, what an
“ odious animal! Who will say that education is
“ on a right footing while its tendency is to cre-
“ ate such a monster! Ye parents, listen, and be
“ wise. Would you have your children healthy,
“ and polite, and *sentimental*? Let their early
“ youth be employed in genteel exercises; the
“ theatre, the coffeehouse, and the card table
“ will refine their taste, instruct them in publick
“ affairs, and produce habits of attention and con-
“ trivance; and the French authors will make
“ them men of wit and sprightly conversation,
“ and give a certain *je ne sçais quoi* of elegance
“ to their whole behaviour; but for Greek and
“ Latin, the study of Gronovius, Scaliger, and
“ Burman, the accomplishment of Dutch com-
“ mentators and Jesuits; heavens! what has a man
“ of fashion to do with it!”

Most of the discourses I have heard or read on this side of the question were in a similar style of vague declamation; seasoned with high encomiums on the utility and elegance of the French language and literature, and on the late discoveries in physiology for which we cannot be said to be indebted to any of the sages of Greece and Rome. And how easy is it to declaim on such a topick! By blending some truth with your falsehood; by giving to the latter the air of harm-

less amplification, and by descanting on the abuses of study, as if they were its natural consequences, you may compose a very plausible harangue; such as could not be fully answered without greater waste of time and patience, than the champion of antiquity would think it worth his while to bestow. And if your doctrine happens to flatter the prejudices, the vanity, or the indolence of the age, you will be regarded by some as a fine writer, of liberal principles, and a manly spirit.

It is however thought by many, who in my opinion are more competent judges, that an early acquaintance with the classicks is the only foundation of good learning, and that it is incumbent on all who direct the studies of youth, to have this great object continually before them, as a matter of the most serious concern; for that a good taste in literature is friendly both to publick and to private virtue; and of course tends to promote in no inconsiderable degree the glory of a nation; and that as the ancients are more or less understood, the principles and the spirit of sound erudition will ever be found to flourish or decay. I shall therefore state as briefly as possible some of the peculiar advantages that seem to me to accompany this sort of study; with a view to obviate, if I can, certain prejudices, which I am

sorry to observe have of late years been gaining ground, at least in the northern part of this island. The subject is copious; but I doubt whether those adversaries to whom I now address myself would take the trouble to read a long dissertation.

The objections that are most commonly made to the study of the Greek and Latin authors, may perhaps be reduced to four. It is said, first, "that this mode of education obliges the student "to employ too much time in the acquisition of "words: secondly, that when he has acquired "these languages, he does not find, that they repay his toil: thirdly, that the studies of a grammar school have a tendency to encumber the "genius, and consequently to weaken, rather "than improve, the human mind: and, lastly, "that the classick authors contain many descriptions and doctrines that may seduce the understanding, inflame the passions, and corrupt the "heart."

I. 1. In answer to the first objection, I would observe that the plan of study must be very bad, where the student's health is hurt by too close application. Some parents and teachers have thought that the proficiency of the scholar must be in proportion to the number of hours he employs in conning his task; but that is a great mis-

take. Experience proves, that three or four hours a day, properly employed in the grammar school, have a better effect than nine; and are sufficient to lay within a few years a good foundation of classical knowledge. Dunces, it is true, would require more time; but dunces have nothing to do with Greek and Latin: for studies that yield neither delight nor improvement are not only superfluous but hurtful; because they misemploy those faculties which nature had destined to other purposes. At the same time, therefore, that young men are prosecuting their grammatical studies, they may learn writing, drawing, arithmetick, and the principles of geometry; and may devote the intervals of leisure to riding, fencing, dancing, and other manly exercises. Idleness is the greatest misfortune incident to early years; the distempers it breeds in the soul are numberless and incurable. And where children, during their hours of relaxation, are left at their own disposal, they too often make choice of criminal amusement and bad company. At Sparta, the youth were continually under the inspection of those who had authority over them; their education, says Plutarch, was one continued exercise of obedience; but it was never said, that the Spartan youth became torpid, or melancholy, or sickly, from want of amusement. Wherever there is a

school, there ought to be, and generally is, a field or area for diversions; and if the hours that boys in this country spend with one another, that is, in sauntering, and too often in gaming, quarreling, and swearing, were to be devoted to exercise, under the eye of some person of prudence, their souls and bodies would both be the better for it; and a great deal of time left for the study of many branches of knowledge, besides what is contained in the grammar, and ancient authors. The misfortune is, that we allot too much of their time, not to play, but to idleness; and hence it happens, that their classical studies interfere with other necessary parts of education. But certain it is, that their studies and amusements might be made perfectly consistent; and the culture of the mind promoted at the same time with that of the body. If both these ends are not always accomplished, and but seldom pursued, the blame is to be laid neither on the teacher, nor on the things that are taught, but on those persons only who have the power of reforming our school discipline, and want the inclination. At any rate, the blame cannot be laid on the classick authors, or on those very useful members of a commonwealth, the compilers of grammars and dictionaries. For the faculties of children might be dissipated by idleness, their manners poisoned by

bad company, or their health impaired by injudicious confinement, though Greek and Latin were annihilated.

2. It is another abuse of study, when the hours of attendance in a grammar school are all employed in the acquisition of words. If a child find nothing but words in the old authors, it must be owing to the stupifying influence of an ignorant teacher. The most interesting part of profane history is delivered by the writers of Greece and Rome. From them also we may learn the purest precepts of uninspired morality, delivered in the most enchanting language, illustrated by the happiest allusions, and enforced by the most pertinent examples, and most emphatical reasoning. Whatever is amusive and instructive in fable, whatever in description is beautiful, or in composition harmonious, whatever can sooth or awaken the human passions, the Greek and Roman authors have carried to perfection. That children should enter into all these beauties, is not to be imagined; but that they may be made to comprehend them so far as to be improved and delighted in a high degree, admits of no doubt. Together with the words, therefore, of these two celebrated languages, they may learn, without any additional expense of time, the principles of history, morality, politicks, geography, and criticism; which,

when taught in a foreign dialect, will perhaps be found to leave a deeper impression upon the memory, than when explained in the mother tongue. The young student should be equally attentive to the phraseology and to the subject of his lesson; and receive directions for analyzing the one, as well as for construing the other. He ought to read his authors, first as a grammarian, secondly as a philosopher, and lastly as a critick; and all this he may do without difficulty, and with delight as well as profit, if care is taken to proportion his task to his years and capacity. Nor let it be supposed, that the first principles of grammar are more intelligible to a young mind, than the rudiments of philosophy and rhetorick. In matters within their sphere, do we not find that children can distinguish between truth and falsehood; perceive the connection of causes and effects; infer an obvious conclusion from plain premises, and even make experiments upon nature for the regulation of their own conduct? And if in musick, and drawing, and penmanship, and phraseology, the taste of a child is improvable, why not in composition and style, the cadence of periods, and the harmony of verse, probability of fable and accuracy of description? The more we attend to an author's subject, the greater proficiency we shall always make in his language.

To understand the subject well, it is necessary to study the words and their connection with a critical eye; whereas, even when his knowledge of the words is very superficial, a scholar or tutor, who attends to nothing else, may think himself sufficiently acquainted with the author's meaning. The mere grammatical teacher will never be found to have any true taste for his author: if he had, it would be impossible for him to confine himself to verbal remarks: he must give scope to his admiration or disgust, if he really feel those passions; and must therefore communicate to the pupil some portion of his own enthusiasm or sagacity.

3. The mental faculties of children stand as much in need of improvement, and consequently of exercise, as their bodily powers. Nor is it of small importance to devise some mode of discipline for fixing their attention. When this is not done, they become thoughtless and dissipated to a degree that often unfits them for the business of life.

The Greeks and Romans had a just sense of the value of this part of education. The youth of Sparta, when their more violent exercises were over, employed themselves in works of stratagem; which in a state, where wealth and avarice were unknown, could hardly be carried to any

criminal excess. When they met together for conversation, their minds were continually exerted in judging of the morality of actions, and the expediency of publick measures of government; or in bearing with temper, and retorting with spirit the sarcasms of goodnatured raillery. They were obliged to express themselves, without hesitation, in the fewest and plainest words possible. These institutions must have made them thoughtful, and attentive, and observant both of men and things. And accordingly, their good sense, and penetration, and their nervous and sententious style, were no less the admiration of Greece, than their sobriety, patriotism, and invincible courage. For the talent of *saying* what we call *good things* they were eminent among all the nations of antiquity. As they never piqued themselves on their rhetorical powers, it was prudent to accustom the youth to silence and few words. It made them modest and thoughtful. With us very sprightly children sometimes become very dull men. For we are apt to reckon those children the sprightliest, who talk the most: and as it is not easy for them to think and talk at the same time, the natural effect of their too much speaking is too little thinking. At Athens, the youth were made to study their own language with accuracy both in the pronuncia-

tion and composition; and the meanest of the people valued themselves upon their attainments in this way. Their orators must have had a very difficult part to act, when by the slightest impropriety they ran the hazard of disgusting the whole audience: and we shall not wonder at the extraordinary effects produced by the harangues of Demosthenes, or the extraordinary care wherewith those harangues were composed, when we recollect, that the minutest beauty in his performance must have been perceived and felt by every one of his hearers. It has been matter of surprise to some, that Cicero, who had so true a relish for the severe simplicity of the Athenian orator, should himself in his orations have adopted a style so diffuse and declamatory. But Cicero knew what he did. He had a people to deal with, who, compared with the Athenians, might be called illiterate;* and to whom Demosthenes would have appeared as cold and uninteresting as Cicero would have seemed pompous and inflated to the people of Athens. In every part of learning the Athenians were studious to excel. Rhetorick in all its branches was to them an object of

* Cicero himself acknowledges, that many of the Romans were very incompetent judges of rhetorical merit. *Hæc turba et barbaria forensis dat locum vel vitiosissimis oratoribus.* De Orat. lib. 1. § 118.

principal consideration. From the story of Socrates we may learn, that the literary spirit was keener at Athens, even in that corrupted age, than at any period in any other country. If a person of mean condition, and of the lowest fortune, with the talents and temper of Socrates, were now to appear, inculcating virtue, dissuading from vice, and recommending a right use of reason, not with the grimace of an enthusiast, or the rant of a declaimer, but with good humour, plain language, and sound argument, we cannot suppose, that the youth of high rank would pay him much attention in any part of Europe. As a juggler, gambler, or atheist, he might perhaps attract their notice, and have the honour to do no little mischief in some of our clubs of young worthies; but from virtue and modesty, clothed in rags, I fear they would not willingly receive improvement. The education of the Romans, from the time they began to aspire to a literary character, was similar to that of the Athenians. The children were taught to speak their own language with purity, and made to study and translate the Greek authors. The laws of the twelve tables they committed to memory. And as the talent of publick speaking, was not only ornamental, but even a necessary qualification, to every man who wished to distinguish himself in

a civil or military capacity, all the youth were ambitious to acquire it. The study of the law was also a matter of general concern. Even the children used in their diversions to imitate the procedure of publick trials; one accusing, and another defending, the supposed criminal: and the youth and many of the most respectable statesmen, through the whole of their lives, allotted part of their leisure to the exercise of declaiming on such topicks as might come to be debated in the forum, in the senate, or before the judges. Their domestick discipline was very strict. Some ancient matron, of approved virtue, was appointed to superintend the children in their earliest years; before whom every thing criminal in word or deed was avoided as a heinous enormity. This venerable person was careful both to instil good principles into her pupils, and also to regulate their amusements, and, by preserving their minds pure from moral turpitude, and intellectual depravation, to prepare them for the study of the liberal arts and sciences. It may also be remarked, that the Greeks and Romans were more accurate students than the moderns are. They had few books, and those they had were not easily come at: what they read, therefore, they read thoroughly. I know not, whether their way of writing and making up their vo-

lumes, as it rendered the perusal more difficult, might not also occasion a more durable remembrance. From their conversation pieces, and other writings it appears, that they had a singular facility in quoting their favourite authors. Demosthenes is said to have transcribed Thucydides eight times, and to have got a great part of him by heart. This is a degree of accuracy which the greater part of modern readers have no notion of. We seem to think it more creditable to read many books superficially, than to read a few good ones with care; and yet it is certain, that by the latter method we should cultivate our faculties, and increase our stock of real knowledge, more effectually, and perhaps more speedily, than we can do by the former, which indeed tends rather to bewilder the mind, than to improve it. Every man, who pretends to a literary character, must now read a number of books, whether well or ill written, whether instructive or insignificant, merely that he may have it to say, that he has read them. And therefore I am apt to think, that, in general, the Greeks and Romans must have been more improved by their reading, than we are by ours. As books multiply, knowledge is more widely diffused; but if human wisdom were to increase in the same proportion, what children would the ancients be, in comparison of the moderns! of whom every subscriber

to the circulating library, would have it in his power to be wiser than Socrates, and more accomplished than Julius Cesar!

I mention these particulars of the Greek and Roman discipline, in order to show, that, although the ancients had not so many languages to study as we have, nor so many books to read, they were however careful, that the faculties of their children should neither languish for want of exercise, nor be exhausted in frivolous employment. As we have not thought fit to imitate them in this; as most of the children of modern Europe, who are not obliged to labour for their sustenance, must either study Greek and Latin, or be idle (for as to cards, and some of the late publications of Voltaire, I do not think the study of either half so useful or so innocent as shuttlecock) I should be apprehensive, that, if classical learning were laid aside, nothing would be substituted in its place, and that our youth would become altogether dissipated. In this respect, therefore, namely, as the means of improving the faculties of the human mind, I do not see, how the studies of the grammar school can be dispensed with. Indeed, if we were, like the savages, continually employed in searching after the necessities of life; or if, like the first Romans, our situation or temper involved us in perpetual war, I

should perhaps allow literary improvement of every kind to be little better than a costly superfluity: and if any one were disposed to affirm, that in such a state men may enjoy a greater share of animal pleasure, than all the ornaments of art and luxury can furnish, I should not be eager to controvert his opinion. But I take for granted, that man is destined for something nobler than mere animal enjoyment; that a state of continual war or unpolished barbarity is unfavourable to our best interests, as rational, moral, and immortal beings; that competence is preferable to want, leisure to tumult, and benevolence to fury: and I speak of the arts, not of supporting, but of adorning human life; not of rendering men insensible to cold and famine, but of enabling them to bear without being enervated, and enjoy without being corrupted, the blessings of a more prosperous condition.

4. Much has been said by some writers on the impropriety of teaching the ancient languages by book, when the modern tongues are most easily acquired, without the help of grammars or dictionaries, by speaking only. Hence it has been proposed, that children (to whom the study of grammar is conceived to be a grievous hardship) should learn Latin by being obliged to speak it; for that, however barbarous their style may be at first, it will gradually improve; till at

length, though with little knowledge of rules, merely by the force of habit, they attain to such a command of that tongue, as an Englishman may of the French, by residing a few years at Paris. Upon this principle, some projectors have thought of establishing a Latin city, whither children should be sent to learn the language; Montaigne's father made Latin the common dialect of his household;* and many philosophers and

* *Essais de Montaigne*, liv. 2. chap. 17. On the subject of obliging children to speak Latin, before they have acquired a taste in it, I beg leave to quote the following passage from an author, whose judgment in these matters must be allowed to be of the very highest authority.

“ With this way of good understanding the matter,
“ plain construing, diligent parsing, daily translating,
“ cheerful admonishing, and heedful amending of faults,
“ never leaving behind just praise for well doing, I would
“ have the scholar brought up withal, till he had read
“ and translated over the first book of (Cicero's) *Epistles*
“ chosen out by Sturmius, with a good piece of
“ a comedy of Terence also. All this while, by mine advice,
“ the child shall use to speak no Latin. For, as Cicero saith
“ in like matter, with like words, *Loquendo, male loqui discunt*.
“ And that excellent learned man G. Budeus, in his Greek
“ commentaries, sore complaineth, that when he began to
“ learn the Latin tongue, use of speaking Latin at the table,
“ and elsewhere, unadvisedly, did bring him to such an evil
“ choice of

teachers have laid it down as a rule, that in the grammar school nothing but Latin or Greek should ever be spoken.

All this, or at least part of it, is very well, if

“ words, to such a crooked framing of sentences, that
“ no one thing did hurt or hinder him more all the days
“ of his life afterwards both for readiness in speaking,
“ and also good judgment in writing. In very deed, if
“ children were brought up in such a house, or such
“ a school, where the Latin tongue were properly and
“ and perfectly spoken, as Tiberius and Caius Gracchii
“ were brought up in their mother Cornelia’s house;
“ surely then the daily use of speaking were the best and
“ readiest way to learn the Latin tongue. But now, com-
“ monly in the best schools in England, for words, right
“ choice is smally regarded, true propriety wholly ne-
“ glected, confusion is brought in, barbarousness is bred
“ up so in young wits, as afterwards they be not only
“ marred for speaking, but also corrupted in judgment,
“ as with much ado, or never at all, they be brought
“ to the right frame again. Yet all men covet to have
“ their children speak Latin, and so do I very earnestly
“ too. We both have one purpose, we agree in desire,
“ we wish one end; but we differ somewhat in order
“ and way that leadeth rightly to that end. Other would
“ have them speak at all adventures: and so they be
“ speaking, to speak, the master careth not, the scholar
“ knoweth not, what. This is to seem, and not to be; ex-
“ cept it be, to be bold without shame, rash without skill,
“ full of words without wit. I wish to have them speak

we suppose the sole design of teaching these languages to be, that children may speak and write them as easily and incorrectly, as persons unacquainted with grammar, and with the rules and models of good composition, do commonly speak and write their mother tongue. But such a talent, though on some rare occasions in life it might be useful, would not be attended with those certain and more immediate advantages, that one has reason to expect from a regular course of classical study. For, first, one use of classick learning is, to fill up the leisure hours of life with liberal amusement. Now those readers alone can be adequately charmed with beauty of language, who have attended to the rules of good writing, and even to the niceties of grammar. For the mere knowledge of words gives but little pleasure; and they who have gone no deeper in language cannot even conceive the delight wherewith a man of learning peruses an elegant performance. Secondly, I apprehend, that, in this way of conversa-

“ so, as it may well appear, that the brain doth govern the
 “ tongue, and that reason leadeth forth the talk. Good
 “ understanding must first be bred in the children;
 “ which being nourished with skill, and use of writing,
 “ is the only way to bring them to judgment and readi-
 “ ness in speaking.” Ascham’s Scholemaster, book 1.
 See also Cicero de Orat. lib. 1. § 150. edit. Proust.

tion, unless you add to it the study of grammar, and of the best authors, the practice of many years will not make you a competent master in the language. One must always be something of a grammarian to be able thoroughly to understand any well written book; but before one can enter into the delicacies of expression that are to be met with in every page of a good Latin or Greek author, one must be an accurate grammarian; the complicated inflexions and syntax of these elegant tongues giving rise to innumerable subtilities of connection, and minute varieties of meaning, whereof the superficial reader, who thinks grammar below his notice, can have no idea. Besides, the words and phrases that belong to conversation, are, comparatively speaking, not very numerous: unless you read poets, orators, historians, and philosophers too, you can never understand a language in its full extent. In English, Latin, Greek, and Italian, and, I believe, in most other cultivated tongues, the poetical and rhetorical styles differ greatly from that of common discourse; and one may be a tolerable proficient in the one, who is very ignorant of the other. But thirdly, I would observe, that the study of a system of grammar, so complex and so perfect as the Greek or Latin, may, with peculiar propriety, be recommended to children; being suited to their

understanding, and having a tendency to promote the improvement of all their mental faculties. In this science, abstruse as it is commonly imagined to be, there are few or no difficulties which a master may not render intelligible to any boy of good parts, before he is twelve years old. Words, the matter of this science, are within the reach of every child; and of these the human mind, in the beginning of life, is known to be susceptible to an astonishing degree: and yet in this science there is a subtlety, and a variety, sufficient to call forth all the intellectual powers of the young student. When one hears a boy analyze a few sentences of a Latin author; and show that he not only knows the general meaning, and the import of the particular words, but also can instantly refer each word to its class; enumerate all its terminations, specifying every change of sense, however minute, that may be produced by a change of inflexion or arrangement; explain its several dependencies; distinguish the literal meaning from the figurative, one species of figure from another,* and even the philosophical use of words

* The elements of rhetorick should always be taught in conjunction with those of grammar. The former would make the latter more entertaining; and, by setting the various parts of language in a new light, would give rise to new energies in the mind of the student,

from the idiomatical, and the vulgar from the elegant; recollecting occasionally other words and phrases that are synonymous, or contrary, or of different though similar signification; and ac-

and prepare him for relishing the beauties and practising the rules of good writing; thus heightening the pleasure of study, with little or no increase of labour. I doubt not but Butler's flippancy remark, that "All a rhetorician's rules consist in naming of his tools," may have brought the art into some disrepute. But though this were a true account, (and it must be a poor system of rhetorick of which this is a true account), the art might have its use notwithstanding. Nobody thinks the time lost to a young seaman, which he employs in acquainting himself with the names and uses of the several parts of a ship, and of the other objects that demand the attention of the mariner: nor is the botanist idle, while he treasures up in his memory the various tribes of vegetables; nor the astronomer, while he numbers the constellations, and learns to call them by their names. In every art there are terms, which must be familiar to those who would understand it, or speak intelligibly about it; and few arts are more complex than literary composition. Besides, though some of the tropes and figures of speech are easily distinguished, others require a more difficult scrutiny, and some knowledge even of the elementary arrangements of philosophy. And the rules for applying the elegancies of language, being founded in the science of human nature, must gradually lead the young rhetorician to at-

counting for what he says, either from the reason of the thing, or by quoting a rule of art, or a classical authority: one must be sensible, that by such an exercise, the memory is likely to be more improved in strength and readiness, the attention better fixed, the judgment and taste more successfully exerted, and a habit of reflection and subtle discrimination more easily acquired, than it could be by any other employment equally suited to the capacity of childhood. A year passed in this salutary exercise will be found to cultivate the human faculties more than seven spent in prattling that French which is learned by rote; nor would a complete course of Voltaire yield half so much improvement to a young mind, as a few books of a good classick author, of Livy, Cicero, or Virgil, studied in this accurate manner.

I mean not to decry the French tongue, which I know to be useful to all, and necessary to many. Far less would I insinuate any thing to discourage the study of our own, which I think the finest in the world; and which to a member of the British empire is of greater importance than all

tend to what passes in his own mind; which of all the scenes of human observation is the most important, and in the early part of life the least attended to.

other languages. I only insist on the expediency of improving young minds by a grammatical study of the classick tongues; these being at once more *regular* and more *diversified* than any of the modern, and therefore better adapted to the purpose of exercising the *judgment* and the *memory* of the scholar. And I maintain, that every language, and indeed every thing, that is taught children, should be accurately taught; being of opinion, that the mind is more improved by a little accurate knowledge, than by an extensive smattering; and that it would be better for a young man to be master of Euclid or Demosthenes, than to have a whole dictionary of arts and sciences by heart. When he has once got a taste of accuracy, he will know the value and the method of it; and, with a view to the same gratification, will habitually pursue the same method, both in science, and in the general conduct of his affairs: whereas a habit of superficial thinking perverts and enervates the powers of the soul, leaves many of them to languish in total inactivity; and is too apt to make a man fickle and thoughtless, unprincipled and dissipated for life.

I agree with Rousseau, that the aim of education should be, to teach us rather *how* to think, than *what* to think; rather to improve our minds so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to

load the memory with the thoughts of other men. Not that I would discommend the acquisition of good principles, and just notions, from whatever source they are drawn: for indeed the knowledge of the most ingenious man upon earth would be very scanty, if it were all to be derived from himself. Nay as the parent must in many cases direct the conduct of the child, before the child can discern the reasons of such direction, I am inclined to think, that some important principles of religion and morality may with good success be imprinted on the memory of children, even before they can perfectly understand the arguments by which they may be proved, or the words in which they are expressed. But still it is true, that a mind prepared by proper discipline for making discoveries of its own, is in a much higher state of cultivation, than that of a mere scholar who knows nothing but what he has been taught. The latter resembles a granary, which may indeed be filled with corn, but can yield no more than it has received; the former may be likened to a fruitful field, which is ever in a condition to bring riches and plenty, and multiplies an hundredfold every grain that has been committed to it. Now this peculiar advantage seems to attend the study of the classick authors, that it not only stores the mind with useful learning.

but also begets a habit of attention, and wonderfully improves both the memory and the judgment.

5. That the grammatical art may be learned as perfectly from an English or French, as from a Greek or Latin grammar, no person will affirm, who attends to the subject, and can state the comparison. Classical learning, therefore, is necessary to grammatical skill. And that the knowledge of grammar tends to purify and preserve language, might be proved, if a proof were requisite, from many considerations. Every tongue is incorrect, while it is only spoken; because men never study it grammatically, till after they have begun to write it, or compose in it. And when brought to its highest perfection, by the repeated efforts, and accumulated refinements, of grammarians, lexicographers, philosophers, etymologists, and of authors in general, how incorrectly is it spoken and written by the unlearned! How easily do ungrammatical phrases, the effect of ignorance and affectation, insinuate themselves into common discourse, and thence into writing; and how difficult is it often found, notwithstanding all the remonstrances of learned men, to extirpate those phrases from the language, or prevail with the publick to reform them! Where grammar was accurately studied, language has always been elegant and durable.

witness that of ancient Greece, which, though it underwent considerable alterations, as all living languages must do, retained its purity for more than a thousand years. As grammar is neglected, barbarism must prevail. And therefore the study of Greek and Latin, being necessary to the perfection of the grammatical art must also be necessary to the permanence and purity even of the modern tongues, and, consequently, to the preservation of our history, poetry, philosophy, and of every thing valuable in our literature. Can those who wish well to learning or mankind ever seek to depreciate so important a study? or will it be said, that the knowledge of grammar is unworthy of a gentleman, or man of business, when it is considered, that the most profound statesmen, the ablest orators, the most elegant writers, and the greatest men, that ever appeared on the stage of publick life, of whom I shall only mention Julius Cesar and Cicero, were not only studious of grammar, but most accurate grammarians?*

6. To all this we may add, that the discipline generally established in schools of learning inures the youth to obedience and subordination; of which it is of infinite consequence to their moral

* Quintil. Orat. Inst. lib. 1. cap. 4. See also *Of the origin and progress of language.*

improvement, as well as to the prosperity of their country, that they should early be made sensible. But is not this discipline often too formal, and too rigorous? And if so, does it not tend to depress the mind, by making it attentive to trifles, and by giving an air of servility to the genius, as well as to the outward behaviour? These questions need no other answer than the bare recital of a fact, obvious to all men; that of all the nations now existing, *that* whose general character partakes the least of finicalness or servility, and which has displayed an elevation of soul, and a spirit of freedom, that is without example in the annals of mankind, is the most remarkable for strictness of discipline in its schools and universities; and seems now to be the only nation upon earth that entertains a proper sense of the unspeakable value of classick erudition. A regard to order and lawful authority is as favourable to true greatness of mind, as the knowledge of method is to true genius.

7. Some of my readers will pity, and some probably laugh at me, for what I am going to say in behalf of a practice, which is now in most countries both disused and derided; I mean that of obliging the student to compose some of his exercises in Latin verse. "What! (it will be said) do you, in opposition to the sentiments of antiquity itself, and of all wise men in every

“ age, imagine, that a talent for poetry is to be
“ communicated by rule, or acquired by habit?
“ Or if it could, would you wish to see us trans-
“ formed into a nation of versifiers? Poetry may
“ have its use; but it will neither fill our ware-
“ houses, nor fertilize our soil; neither rig our
“ fleet, nor regulate our finances. It has now lost
“ the faculty of building towns, felling timber,
“ and curing broken bones; and I think it was
“ never famous for replenishing either the pocket
“ or the belly. No, no, sir; a garret in Grub-
“ street, however honourable in your eyes, is not
“ the station to which I intend to breed my son.”

Permit me to ask in my turn, whether it is in order to make them authors by trade, or for what other purpose it is, that boys have the task enjoined them, of composing themes and translations, and performing those other exercises, to which writing is necessary. I believe it will be allowed, that habits of accurate thinking, and of speaking correctly and elegantly, are useful and ornamental in every station of life. Now Cicero and Quintilian, and many other authors, affirm, that these habits are most effectually acquired by the frequent use of the pen;* not in extracting

* Cicero de Orat. lib. 1. § 150. Edit. Proust. Quintil. Inst. Or. lib. 10. cap. 3.

common places from books,* but in giving permanence and regularity to our own thoughts expressed in our own words. The themes and translations performed by boys in a grammar school

* To enable us to remember what we read, some authors recommend a book of common places, wherein we are desired to write down, according to a certain artificial order, all those passages that we wish to add to our stock of learning. But other authors, of equal judgment in these matters, have blamed this practice of writing out quotations. It is certain, that when we read with a view to fill up common places, we are apt to attend rather to particular passages, than to the scope and spirit of the whole; and that, having transcribed the favourite paragraph, we are not solicitous to remember it, as knowing that we may at any time find it in our common place book. Besides, life is short, and health precious; and if we do not think more than we either write or read, our studies will avail us little. But this practice of continual transcription consumes time, and impairs health, and yet conveys no improvement to the mind, because it requires no thought, and exercises no faculty. Moreover, it inclines us to form ourselves entirely upon the sentiments of other men; and as different authors think differently on many points, it may make us change our opinions so often, that at last we shall come to have no fixed principle at all. And yet on the other hand, it must be allowed, that many things occur both in reading and in experience, which ought not to be forgotten, and yet cannot be preserved, unless

are the beginnings of this salutary practice; and are known to have a happy effect in forming the judgment, improving the memory, and quickening the invention, of the young student, in giving him a command of words, a correct phraseology, and a habit of thinking with accuracy and method.

Now, as the design of these exercises is not to make men professed prose authors, so neither is the practice of versifying intended to make them poets. I do not wish the numbers of versifiers to multiply; I shall, if you please, admit the old maxim, "*Poeta nascitur, non fit*;" and that it would be as easy to soften marble into pincushions

committed to writing. Perhaps, then, it is best to follow a middle course; and, when we register facts or sentiments that occur in reading, to throw aside the author from whom we take them, and do it in our own words. In this way writing is profitable, because it is attended with thought and recollection, as well as practice in composition. And when we are so much masters of the sentiments of another man as to be able to express them with accuracy in our own words, then we may be said to have digested them, and made them our own; and then it is, and not before, that our understanding is really improved by them. If we choose to preserve a specimen of an author's style, or to transcribe any of his thoughts in his own words on account of something that pleases in the expression, there can be no harm in this, provided we do not employ too much time in it.

as to communicate the art of póetry to one who wants the génius:

— Ego nec studium sine divite vena,
Nec rude quid possit video ingenium. —

The practice in question may, however, in my judgment, be attended with some good effects. First, though we have for ever lost the true pronunciation of Latin and Greek, yet the less false our pronunciation is, the more agreeable and intelligible it will probably be. Versification, therefore, considered as an exercise for exemplifying and fixing in the mind the rules of prosody, may be allowed to have its use in correcting the pronunciation. But, secondly, it has a further use, in heightening the charms of poetical composition, by improving our sense of poetical harmony. I have already mentioned amusement as one of the advantages of classick learning. Now good poetry is doubly amusing to a reader who has studied and practised versification, as the shapes and colours of animal and vegetable nature seem doubly beautiful to the eye of a painter. “I begin,” says Pope, speaking of his proficiency in drawing, “to discover beauties that were till now imperceptible to me. Every corner of an eye, or turn of a nose or ear, the smallest degree of light or shade on a cheek or in a dimple,

“have charms to distract me.”* For the same reason, therefore, that I would recommend drawing to him who wishes to acquire a true taste for the beauties of nature, I should recommend a little practice in versifying to those who would be thoroughly sensible to the charm of poetick numbers. Thirdly, this practice is still more important, as it gradually supplies the student with a store of words; thereby facilitating the acquisition of the language; and as it accustoms him to exert his judgment and taste, as well as memory, in the choice of harmonious and elegant expressions. By composing in prose, he learns to think and speak methodically; and his poetical exercises, under a proper direction, will make the ornaments of language familiar to him, and give precision to his thoughts, and a vigorous brevity to his style. These advantages may, I presume, be in some degree attained, though his verses, unaided by genius, should never rise above mediocrity: if the muses are propitious, his improvement will be proportionably greater.

But is not this exercise too difficult? and does it not take up too much time? Too much time it ought not to take up; nor should it be imposed on those who find it too difficult. But if we con-

* Pope's letters to Gay.

sult experience, we shall find, that boys of ordinary talents are capable of it, and that it never has on any occasion proved detrimental to literature. I know several learned men who were inured to it in their youth; but I never heard them complain of its unprofitableness or difficulty: and I cannot think, that Grotius or Buchanan, Milton or Addison, Browne or Gray,* had ever any reason to lament, as lost, the hours they employed in this exercise. It is generally true, that genius displays itself to the best advantage in its native tongue. Yet it is to be wished, that the talent of writing Latin verse were a little more cultivated among us; for it has often proved the means of extending the reputation of our authors, and consequently of adding something to the literary glories of Great Britain. Boileau is said not to have known that there were any good poets in England, till Addison made

* Isaac Hawkins Browne, Esq. author of several excellent poems, particularly one in Latin, on the immortality of the soul; of which Mrs. Carter justly says, that it does honour to our country. Mr. Gray of Cambridge, the author of the finest odes, and of the finest moral elegy in the world, wrote many elegant Latin poems in his youth, with some of which Mr Mason has lately obliged the publick. The Latin Poems of Grotius and Buchanan, Milton and Addison, have long been universally known and admired.

him a present of the *Musa Anglicana*. Many of the finest performances of Pope, Dryden, and Milton, have appeared not ungracefully in a Roman dress. And those foreigners must entertain a high opinion of our pastoral poetry, who have seen the Latin translations of Vincent Bourne, particularly those of the ballads of *Tweedside*, *William and Margaret*, and Rowe's *Despairing beside a clear stream*; of which it is no compliment to say, that in sweetness of numbers, and elegant expression, they are at least equal to the originals, and scarce inferiour to any thing in Ovid or Tibullus.

Enough, I hope, has been said to evince the utility of that mode of discipline which for the most part is, and always, in my opinion, ought to be, established in grammar schools. If the reader admit the truth of these remarks, he will be satisfied, that "the study of the classick authors" does not necessarily oblige the student to employ too much time in the acquisition of words: for that by means of those words the mind may be stored with valuable knowledge; and that the acquisition of them, prudently conducted, becomes to young persons one of the best instruments of intellectual proficiency, which in the present state of human society it is possible to imagine.

II. I need not spend much time in refuting

the second objection, "That these languages, when acquired, are not worth the labour." There never was a man of learning and taste, who would not deny the fact. Those persons are most delighted with the ancient writers, who understand them best; and none affect to despise them, but they who are ignorant of their value. Whether the pleasure and profit arising from the knowledge of the classick tongues is sufficient to repay the toil of acquiring them, is a point which those only who have made the acquisition are entitled to determine. And they, we are sure, will determine in the affirmative. The admirer of Homer and Demosthenes, Virgil and Cicero, Xenophon and Cesar, Herodotus and Livy, will tell us, that he would not, for any consideration give up his skill in the language of those authors. Every man of learning wishes that his son may be learned; and that not so much from a view to pecuniary advantage, as from a desire to have him supplied with the means of useful instruction and liberal amusement. It is true, that habit will make us fond of trifling pursuits, and mistake imaginary for real excellence. The being accustomed to that kind of study, and perhaps also the pride, or the vanity, or simply the consciousness, of being learned, may account for part of the pleasure that attends the perusal of the Greek

and Roman writings. But sure it is but a small part which may be thus accounted for. The Greeks were more passionate admirers of Homer and Demosthenes, and the Romans of Virgil and Cicero, than we; and yet were not under the necessity of employing so much time in the study of these authors, nor consequently, so liable to contract a liking from long acquaintance, or to be proud of an accomplishment which was common to them with all their countrymen.

The knowledge of the classicks is the best foundation to the study of law, physick, theology, rhetorick, agriculture, and other honourable arts and sciences. In polite nations, and in companies where the rational character is held in any esteem, it has generally been regarded as a recommendatory talent. As a source of recreation, for filling up the intervals of leisure, its importance has been acknowledged by many names of the highest authority. And surely the muses are more elegant, more instructive, and more pleasing companions, than dogs, horses, gamblers, or sots: and in attending to the wisdom of former ages, we may reasonably be thought to pass our time to better purpose, than in hearing or helping about the censures, calumnies, and other follies, of the present.

III. It has been said, that "school learning

“ has a tendency to encumber the genius, and
“ consequently, to weaken rather than improve
“ the mind.” Here opens another field for declamation. Who has not heard the learned formality of Ben Jonson opposed to Shakspeare’s “ native
“ wood notes wild;” and inferences made from the comparison, very much to the discredit, not of the learned poet only, but of learning itself? Milton, too, is thought by some to have possessed a superfluity of erudition, as well as to have been too ostentatious in displaying it. And the ancients are supposed to have derived great benefit from their not being obliged, as we are, to study a number of languages.

It is true, a man may be so intemperate in reading, as to hurt both his body and his mind. They who always read, and never think, become pedants and changelings. And those who employ the best part of their time in learning languages, are rarely found to make proficiency in art or science. To gain a perfect knowledge even of one tongue, is a work of much labour; though some men have such a talent this way as to acquire, with moderate application, a competent skill in several. Milton, before he was twenty years old, had composed verses in Latin, Italian, and Greek, as well as in English. But the generality of minds are not equal to this; nor is it pe-

cessary they should. One may be very sensible of the beauties of a foreign tongue, and may read it with ease and pleasure, who can neither speak it, nor compose in it. And, except where the genius has a facility in acquiring them, and a strong bias to that sort of study, I would not recommend it to a young man to make himself master of many languages. For, surely, to be able to express the same thought in the dialects of ten different nations, is not the end for which man was sent into the world.

The present objection, as well as the former, is founded on what every man of letters would call a mistake of fact. No person who understands Greek and Latin will ever admit, that these languages can be an incumbrance to the mind. And perhaps it would be difficult to prove, even by a single instance, that genius was ever hurt by learning. Ben Jonson's misfortune was, not that he knew too much, but that he could not make a proper use of his knowledge; a misfortune, which arose rather from a defect of genius or taste, than from a superabundance of erudition. With the same genius, and less learning, he would probably have made a worse figure. His play of Catiline is an ill digested collection of facts and passages from Sallust. Was it his knowledge of Greek and Latin that prevented his making

a better choice? To comprehend every thing the historian has recorded of that incendiary, it is not requisite that one should be a great scholar. By looking into Rose's translation, any man who understands English may make himself master of the whole narrative in half a day. It was Jonson's want of taste, that made him transfer from the history to the play some passages and facts that suit not the genius of dramatick writing: it was want of taste, that made him dispose his materials according to the historical arrangement; which, however favourable to calm information, is not calculated for working those effects on the passions and fancy, which it is the aim of tragedy to produce. It was the same want of taste, that made him, out of a rigid attachment to historical truth, lengthen his piece with supernumerary events inconsistent with the unity of design, and not subservient to the catastrophe; and it was doubtless owing to want of invention, that he confined himself so strictly to the letter of the story. Had he recollected the advice of Horace, (of which he could not be ignorant, as he translated the whole poem into English verse,) he must have avoided some of these faults:

Publica materies privati juris erit, si
Non circa vilem patulumque moraberis orbem,
Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus
Interpres; nec desilies imitator in arctum,
Unde pedem proferre pudor vetat, aut operis lex.*

A little more learning, therefore, or rather a more seasonable application of what he had, would have been of great use to the author on this occasion. Shakspeare's play of Julius Cesar is founded on Plutarch's life of Brutus. The poet has adopted many of the incidents and speeches recorded by the historian, whom he had read in sir Thomas North's translation. But great judgment appears in the choice of passages. Those events and sentiments that either are affecting in themselves, or contribute to the display of human characters and passions, he has adopted; what seemed unsuitable to the drama is omitted. By reading Plutarch and Sophocles in the original, together with the Poeticks of Aristotle and Horace's epistle to the Pisoes, Shakspeare might have made this tragedy better: but I cannot conceive how such a preparation, had the poet been capable of it, could have been the cause of his making it worse. It is very probable that the instance of Shakspeare may have induced some

* Ar. Poet. vers. 135. See Dr. Hurd's elegant commentary and notes.

persons to think unfavourably of the influence of learning upon genius; but a conclusion so important should never be inferred from one instance, especially when that is allowed to be extraordinary, and almost supernatural. From the phenomena of so transcendent a genius, we must not judge of human nature in general, no more than we are to take the rules of British agriculture from what is practised in the Summer islands. Nor let it be any objection to the utility of classic learning, that we often meet with men of excellent parts, whose faculties were never improved, either by the doctrine or by the discipline of the schools. A practice which is not indispensably necessary, may yet be highly useful. We have heard of merchants, who could hardly write or read, superintending an extensive commerce, and acquiring great wealth and esteem by the most honourable means: yet who will say, that writing and reading are not useful to the merchant? There have been men eminent both for genius and for virtue, who in the beginning of life were almost totally neglected: yet who will say, that the care of parents, and early habits of virtue and reflection, are not of infinite importance to the human mind?

Milton was one of the most learned men this nation ever produced. But his great learning

neither impaired his judgment, nor checked his imagination. A richer vein of invention, as well as a more correct taste, appears in the *Paradise Lost*, written when he was near sixty years of age, than in any of his earlier performances. *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, which were his last works, are not so full of imagery, nor admit so much fancy, as many of his other pieces; but they discover a consummate judgment; and little is wanting to make each of them perfect in its kind. I am not offended at that profusion of learning which here and there appears in the *Paradise Lost*. It gives a classical air to the poem: it refreshes the mind with new ideas; and there is something, in the very sound of the names of places and persons whom he celebrates, that is wonderfully pleasing to the ear. Admit all this to be no better than pedantick superfluity; yet will it not follow, that Milton's learning did him any harm upon the whole, provided it appear to have improved him in matters of higher importance. And that it did so, is undeniable. This poet is not more eminent for strength and sublimity of genius, than for the art of his composition, which he owed partly to a fine taste in harmony, and partly to his accurate knowledge of the ancients. The style of his numbers has not often been imitated with success. It is not merely the

want of rhyme, nor the diversified position of pauses, nor the drawing out of the sense from one line to another; far less is it the mixture of antiquated words and strange idioms, that constitutes the charm of Milton's versification; though many of his imitators, when they copy him in these or in some of these respects, think they have acquitted themselves very well. But one must study the best classick authors with as much critical skill as Milton did, before one can pretend to rival him in the art of harmonious writing. For, after all the rules that can be given, there is something in this art, which cannot be acquired but by a careful study of the ancient masters, particularly Homer, Demosthenes, Plato, Cicero, and Virgil; every one of whom, or at least the two first and the last, it would be easy to prove, that Milton has imitated, in the construction of his numbers. In a word we have good reason to conclude, that Milton's genius, instead of being overloaded or encumbered, was greatly improved, enriched, and refined, by his learning. At least we are sure this was his own opinion. Never was there a more indefatigable student. And from the superabundance of classick allusions to be met with in every page of his poetry, we may guess how highly he valued the litera-

ture of Greece and Rome, and how frequently he meditated upon it.

Spenser was learned in Latin and Greek, as well as in Italian. But either the fashion of the times or some deficiency in his own taste, inclined him to prefer the modern to the ancient models. His genius was comprehensive and sublime, his style copious, his sense of harmony delicate: and nothing seems to have been wanting to make him a poet of the highest rank, but a more intimate acquaintance with the classick authors. We may at least venture to say, that if he had been a little more conversant in these, he would not, in his *Shepherd's Calendar*, have debased the tenderness of pastoral with the impure mixture of theological disputation; nor would he have been so intoxicated with the splendid faults of the *Orlando Furioso*, as to construct his *Fairy Queen* on that gothick model, rather than according to the plan which Homer invented, and which Virgil and Tasso (who were also favourites with our author) had so happily imitated. It is said to be on account of the purity of his style, and the variety of his invention, and not for any thing admirable in his plan, that the Italians in general prefer Ariosto to Tasso:* and indeed we can hardly conceive,

* The academicians *della Crusca* published criticisms on Tasso's *Gierusalemme Liberata*; but those related

how a tale so complex and so absurd, so heterogeneous in its parts, and so extravagant as a whole, should be more esteemed than a simple, probable, perspicuous, and interesting fable. Yet Spenser gave the preference to the former; a fact so extraordinary, considering his abilities in other respects, that we cannot account for it, without supposing it to have been partly the effect of a bias contracted by long acquaintance. And if so, have we not reason to think, that if he had been but equally conversant with better patterns, his taste would have acquired a different and better direction?

Dryden's knowledge of foreign and ancient languages did not prevent his being a perfect master of his own. No author ever had a more exquisite sense of the energy and beauty of English words; though it cannot be denied, that his aversion to words of foreign original, and his de-

chiefly to the language, and were founded in too rigorous a partiality for the Florentine dialect. But "the magnificence of Tasso's number and diction, together with his great conformity to epick rules, will for ever overbalance Ariosto's superiour gracefulness and rapidity of expression, and greater fertility of invention. The *Jerusalem* will always be the more striking, and the *Orlando* the more pleasing of the two poems."

Baretti on Italy, vol. 1. p. 252.

sire on all occasions to do honour to his mother tongue, betrays him frequently into mean phrases and vulgar idioms. His unhappy circumstances, or rather perhaps the fashion of his age, alike unfriendly to good morals and good writing, did not permit him to avail himself of his great learning so much as might have been expected. The author of *Polymetis* has proved him guilty of many mistakes in regard to the ancient mythology; and I believe it will be allowed, by all his impartial readers, that a little more learning, or something of a more classical taste, would have been of great use to him, as it was to his illustrious imitator.

I know not whether any nation ever produced a more singular genius than Cowley. He abounds in tender thoughts, beautiful lines, and emphatical expressions. His wit is inexhaustible, and his learning extensive; but his taste is generally barbarous, and seems to have been formed upon such models as Donne, Martial, and the worst parts of Ovid: nor is it possible to read his longer poems with pleasure, while we retain any relish for the simplicity of ancient composition. If this author's ideas had been fewer, his conceits would have been less frequent; so that in one respect learning may be said to have hurt his genius. Yet it does not appear that his Greek and Latin

did him any harm; for his imitations of Anacreon are almost the only parts of him that are now remembered or read. His Davideis, and his translations of Pindar, are destitute of harmony, simplicity, and every other classical grace. Had his inclinations led him to a frequent perusal of the most elegant authors of antiquity, his poems would certainly have been the better for it.

It was never said, nor thought, that Swift, Pope, or Addison,* impaired their genius by too

* "Mr. Addison employed his first years in the study
 "of the old Greek and Roman writers, whose language
 "and manner he caught at that time of life, as strongly as
 "other young people gain a French accent, or a genteel
 "air. An early acquaintance with the classicks is what
 "may be called the goodbreeding of poetry, as it gives a
 "certain gracefulness which never forsakes a mind that
 "contracted it in youth, but is seldom or never hit by
 "those who would learn it too late. He first distinguished himself by his Latin compositions, published
 "in the *Musæ Anglicanæ*; and was admired as one of
 "the best authors since the Augustan age, in the two
 "universities, and the greatest part of Europe, before
 "he was talked of as a poet in town. There is not perhaps any harder task than to tame the natural wildness
 "of wit, and to civilize the fancy. The generality of our
 "old English poets abound in forced conceits and affected phrases; and even those who are said to come
 "the nearest to exactness are but too often fond of un-

close an application to Latin and Greek. On the contrary, we have reason to ascribe to their knowledge of these tongues, that classical purity of style by which their writings are distinguished. All our most eminent philosophers and divines, Bacon, Newton, Cudworth, Hooker, Taylor, Atterbury, Stillingfleet, were profoundly skilled in ancient literature. And every rational admirer of Mr. Locke will acknowledge, that if his learning had been equal to his good sense and manly spirit, his works would have been still more creditable to himself, and more useful to mankind.

In writings of wit and humour, one would be apt to think, that there is no great occasion for the knowledge of antiquity; it being the author's chief aim and business, to accommodate himself to the manners of the present time. And if study be detrimental to any faculty of the mind, we might suspect, that a playful imagination, the parent of wit and humour, would be most likely to suffer by it. Yet the history of our first rate

“natural beauties, and aim at something better than
 “perfection. If Mr. Addison's example and precepts be
 “the occasion, that there now begins to be a great de-
 “mand for correctness, we may justly attribute it to his
 “being first fashioned by the ancient models, and fami-
 “liarized to propriety of thought, and chastity of style.”

Tickel's Account of the Life and Writings of Addison.

geniuses in this way (Shakspeare always excepted) is a proof of the contrary. There is more learning, as well as more wit, in Hudibras, than in any book of the same size now extant. In the Tale of a Tub, the Tatler, and the Spectator, the Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus, and in many parts of Fielding, we discover at once a brilliant wit and copious erudition.

I have confined these brief remarks to English writers. But the same thing might be proved by examples from every literary nation of modern, and even of ancient Europe. For we must not suppose, that the Greek and Latin authors, because they did not study many languages, were illiterate men. Homer and Virgil were skilled in all the learning of their time. The men of letters in those days were capable of more intense application, and had a greater thirst of knowledge, than the generality of the moderns; and would often, in defiance of poverty, fatigue, and danger, travel into distant lands, and visit famous places and persons, to qualify themselves for instructing mankind. And, however learned we may be in modern writings, our curiosity can hardly fail to be raised in regard to the ancient, when we consider, that the greater part of these were the work, and contain the thoughts of men, who had themselves been engaged in the most eventful

scenes of active life; while most modern books contain only the notions of speculative writers, who know but the theory of business, and that but imperfectly, and whose determinations upon the principles of great affairs, and the feelings and sentiments peculiar to active life, are little better than conjecture. At any rate, may we not affirm, that "without the aid of ancient learning, genius cannot hope to rise to those honours to which it is entitled, nor to reach that perfection to which it naturally aspires?" The exceptions are so few, and so singular, that it is unnecessary to insist upon them.

Were we to consider this matter abstractly, we should be led to the same conclusion. For what is the effect of learning upon a sound mind? Is it not to enlarge our stock of ideas; to ascertain, and correct our experimental knowledge; to give us habits of attention, recollection, and observation; and help us to methodise our thoughts, whether acquired or natural, as well as to express them with perspicuity and elegance? This may give a direction to our inventive powers, but surely cannot weaken them. The very worst effect that classical learning can produce on the intelligent mind, is, that it may sometimes transform an original genius into an imitator. Yet this happens not often; and when it does happen, we

ought not perhaps to complain. Ingenious imitations may be as delightful, and as useful, as original compositions. One would not exchange Virgil's *Georgick* for twenty such poems as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, nor Pope's *Eloisa* for all the epistles of Ovid. The sixth book of the *Eneid*, though an imitation of the eleventh of the *Odyssey*, is incomparably more sublime; and the night adventure of Diomedes and Ulysses, excellent as it is, must be allowed to be inferior to the episode of Nisus and Euryalus. Several cantos might be mentioned of the *Fairy Queen*, the preservation of which would not compensate the loss of *The Castle of Indolence*: and notwithstanding the merit of Cervantes, I believe there are few critics in Great Britain, who do not think in their hearts, that Fielding has outdone his master. While the literary world can boast of such imitators as Virgil and Tasso, Boileau and Pope, it has no great reason to lament the scarcity of original writers.

IV. The fourth and last objection to the study of Latin and Greek, "that the classic authors contain descriptions and doctrines, that tend to seduce the understanding, and corrupt the heart," is unhappily founded in truth. And indeed, in most languages there are too many books liable to this censure. And, though a melancholy

truth, it is however true, that a young man, in his closet, and at a distance from bad example, if he has the misfortune to fall into a certain track of study which at present is not unfashionable, may debase his understanding, corrupt his heart, and learn the rudiments of almost every depravation incident to human nature. But to effect this, the knowledge of modern tongues is alone sufficient. Immoral and impious writing is one of those arts in which the moderns are confessedly superiour to the Greeks and Romans.

It does not appear, from what remains of their works, that any of the old philosophers ever went so far as some of the modern, in recommending irreligion and immorality. The pagan theology is too absurd to lessen our reverence for the gospel: but some of our philosophers, as we are pleased to call them, have been labouring hard, and I fear not without success, to make mankind renounce all regard for religious truth, both natural and revealed. Jupiter and his kindred gods may pass for machines in an ancient epick poem; but in a modern one they would be ridiculous, even in that capacity: a proof, that in spite of the enchanting strains wherein their achievements are celebrated, they have lost all credit and consideration in the world, and that the idolatrous fables of classical poetry can never more do any

harm. From the scepticism of Pyrrho, and the atheism of Epicurus, what danger is now to be apprehended! The language of Epicurus, and the poetry of Lucretius, may claim attention; but the reasonings of both the one and the other are too childish to subvert any sound principle, or corrupt any good heart; and would probably have been forgotten or despised long ago, if some worthy authors of these latter times had not taken pains to revive and recommend them. The parts of ancient science that are, and always have been, studied most, are the peripatetick and stoical systems; and these may undoubtedly be read, not only without danger, but even with great benefit both to the heart and to the understanding.

The finest treatises of pagan morality are indeed imperfect; but their authors are entitled to honour, for a good intention, and for having done their best. Errour in that science, as well as in theology, though in us the effect of prejudice and pride, was generally in them the effect of ignorance: and those of them whose names are most renowned, and whose doctrines are best understood, as Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Antoninus, have probably done, and still may do, service to mankind, by the importance of their precepts, by their amiable pictures of particular virtues, and by the pathetick

admonitions and apposite examples and reasonings wherewith their morality is enforced. Love to their country; the parental, filial, and conjugal charities; resignation to the Divine Will; superiority to the evils of life, and to the gifts of fortune; the laws of justice, the rights of human nature; the dignity of temperance, the baseness of sensuality, the proper direction of fortitude, and a generous, candid, and friendly behaviour, are enjoined in their writings with a warmth of expression, and force of argument, which a christian moralist might be proud to imitate. In a word, I think it may be affirmed with confidence, that the knowledge of ancient philosophy and history must contribute to the improvement of the human mind, but cannot now corrupt the heart or understanding of any person who is a friend to truth and virtue.

But what have you to say in vindication of the indecency of the ancient poets, of Aristophanes, Catullus, Ovid, Martial, Petronius, and even of Persius, Juvenal, and Horace? Truly, not a word. I abandon every thing of that sort, whether modern or ancient, to the utmost vengeance of satire and criticism; and should rejoice to hear, that from the monuments of human wit all indecency were expunged for ever. Nor is there any circumstance that could attend such a purification, that

would make me regret it. The immoral passages in most of the authors now mentioned are but few, and have neither elegance nor harmony to recommend them to any but profligates: so strict is the connection between virtue and good taste; and so true it is, that want of decency will always in one degree or other betray want of sense. Horace, Persius, Martial, Catullus, and Ovid himself, might give up all their immoralities, without losing any thing of their wit: and as to Aristophanes and Petronius, I have never been able to discover any thing in either, that might not be consigned to eternal oblivion, without the least detriment to literature. The latter, notwithstanding the name which he has, I know not how, acquired, is in every respect (with the reserve of a few tolerable good verses scattered through his book) a vile writer; his style harsh and affected; and his argument such as can excite no emotion, in any mind not utterly depraved, but contempt and abhorrence. The wit and humour of the Athenian poet are now become almost invisible, and seem never to have been very conspicuous. The reception he met with in his own time was probably owing to the licentiousness of his manners, and virulence of his defamation, (qualities which have given a temporary name to more bad poets than one); and for his reputation in latter

times, as a classick author, he must have been indebted, not to the poignancy of his wit, or the delicacy of his humour, nor to his powers of invention and arrangement, nor to any natural display of human manners to be found in him, (for of all this merit he seems to be destitute) but solely to the antiquity of his language. In proof of one part of this remark, it may be observed, that Plato in his *Symposium* describes him as a glutton, drunkard, and profligate: and to evince the probability of another part of it, I need only mention the excessive labour and zeal wherewith commentators have illustrated certain Greek and Latin performances, which if they had been written in our days would never have been read, and which cannot boast of any excellence, either in the sentiment or composition.

But do you really think, that such mutilations of the old poets, as you seem to propose, can ever take place? Do you think, that the united authority of all the potentates on earth could annihilate, or consign to oblivion, those exceptionable passages? I do not: but I think that those passages should never be explained, nor put in the hands of children. And sure, it is not necessary that they should. In some late editions of Horace, the impurities are omitted, and not so much left as a line of asterisks, to raise a boy's curiosity. By

the attention of parents and teachers, might not all the poets usually read in schools be printed in the same manner? Might not children be informed, that, in order to become learned, it is necessary to read, not every Greek and Latin book, but those books only that may mend the heart, improve the taste, and enlarge the understanding? Might they not be made sensible of the importance of Bacon's aphorism, "That some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested?" that is, as the noble author explains it, "That some are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly with diligence and attention?" a rule, which, if duly attended to, would greatly promote the advancement of true learning, and the pleasure and profit of the student. Might not a young man be taught to set a proper value on good compositions, and to entertain such contempt for the bad, as would secure him against their influence? All this I cannot but think practicable, if those who superintended education would study to advance the moral as well as intellectual improvement of the scholar; and if teachers, translators, and commentators, would consider, that to explain dulness is foolish, and to illustrate obscenity criminal. And if all this were practised, we should have no

reason to complain, of classical erudition, that it has any tendency to seduce the understanding, or inflame the passions. In fact, its inflammatory and seductive qualities would never have been alarming if commentators had thought more, and written less. But they were unhappily too wise to value any thing beyond the knowledge of old words. To have told them, that it is essential to all good writing to improve as well as inform, and to regulate the affections as well as amuse the fancy and enrich the memory; that wicked books can please none but worthless men, who have no right to be pleased, and that their authors instead of praise deserve punishment—would have been to address them in a style, which with all their knowledge of the grammar and dictionary they could not have understood.*

* It must move the indignation of every person who is not an arrant book worm, or abandoned debauchee, to observe how industriously Johannes Dousa, and others of that phlegmatick brotherhood, have expounded the indecencies of Greece and Rome, and dragged into light those abominations that ought to have remained in utter darkness for ever. Mons. Nodot, a critick of the last century, on occasion of having recovered, as he pretends, a part of an ancient manuscript, writes to Mons. Charpentier, Directeur de l'Academie Francoise, in the following terms. "J'ai fait, Monsieur, une decouverte

Still I shall be told, that this scheme, though practicable, is too difficult to permit the hope of its being ever put in execution. Perhaps it may be so. And what then? Because passages that convey improper ideas may be found in some ancient writings, shall we deprive young people of all the instruction and pleasure that attends a regular course of classical study? Because Horace wrote some paltry lines, and Ovid some worthless poems, must Virgil, and Livy, and Cicero,

“très-avantageuse a l’empire des lettres: et pour ne pas
 “tenir votre esprit en suspens, plein de la joye que je
 “ressens moi-même, je vous dirai avec précipitation,
 “que j’ai entre mes mains ce qui manquoit de——. Vous
 “pouvez croire, Monsieur, si animant cet auteur au
 “point que je fais——&c. Vous apercevrez, Monsieur,
 “dans cet ouvrage des beautès qui vous charmeront.—
 “Je vous prie d’annoncer cette decouverte a vos illustres
 “Academiciens; elle merite bien, qu’ils la sçachent des
 “premiers. Je suis ravi que la fortune se soit servie de
 “moi, pour rendre a la posterité un ouvrage si precieux.”
 &c. If the lost decades of Livy had been recovered, this
 zealous Frenchman could hardly have expressed him-
 self with more enthusiasm. What then will the reader
 think when he is told, that this wonderful accession to
 literature, was no other than Petronius Arbitr; an au-
 thor, whom it is impossible to read without disgust, and
 whom if he be ancient, (which is not certain), I scruple
 not to call a disgrace to antiquity.

and Plutarch, and Homer, be consigned to oblivion? I do not here speak of the beauties of the Greek and Latin authors, nor of the vast disproportion there is between what is good in them, and what is bad. In every thing human there is a mixture of evil: but are we for that reason to throw off all concern about human things? Must we set our harvests on fire, or leave them to perish, because a few tares have sprung up with the corn? Because oppression will sometimes take place wherever there is subordination, and luxury wherever there is security, are we therefore to renounce all government? or shall we, according to the advice of certain famous projectors, run naked to the woods, and there encounter every hardship and brutality of savage life, in order to escape from the toothach and rheumatism? If we reject every useful institution that may possibly be attended with inconvenience, we must reject all bodily exercise, and all bodily rest, all arts and sciences, all law, commerce, and society.

If the present objection prove any thing decisive against ancient literature, it will prove a great deal more against the modern. Of classical indecency compared with that of latter times, I do not think so favourably as did a certain critick, who likened the former to the nakedness of a

child, and the latter to that of a prostitute; I think there is too much of the last character in both: but that the modern muses partake of it more than the ancient, is undeniable. I do not care to prove what I say, by a detail of particulars; and am sorry to add, that the point is too plain to require proof. And if so, may not an early acquaintance with the best ancient authors, as teachers of wisdom, and models of good taste, be highly useful as a preservative from the sophistries and immoralities that disgrace some of our fashionable moderns? If a true taste for classick learning shall ever become general, the demand for licentious plays, poems, and novels, will abate in proportion: for it is to the more illiterate readers that this sort of trash is most acceptable. Study, so ignominious and so debasing, so unworthy of a scholar and of a man, so repugnant to good taste and good manners, will hardly engage the attention of those who can relish the original magnificence of Homer and Virgil, Demosthenes and Cicero.

A book is of some value, if it yield harmless amusement; it is still more valuable, if it communicate instruction; but if it answer both purposes, it is truly a matter of importance to mankind. That many of the classick authors possessed the art of blending sweetness with utility, has been

the opinion of all men without exception, who had sense and learning sufficient to qualify them to be judges. Is history instructive and entertaining? We have from these authors a detail of the most important events unfolded in the most interesting manner. Without the histories they have left us, we should have been both ignorant of their affairs, and unskilled in the art of recording our own: for I think it is allowed that the best modern histories are those which in form are most similar to the ancient models. Is philosophy a source of improvement and delight? The Greeks and Romans have given us, I shall not say the most useful, but I will say the fundamental, part of human science; have led us into a train of thinking, which of ourselves we should not so soon have taken to; and have set before us an endless multitude of examples and inferences, which, though not exempt from error, do however suggest the proper methods of observation and profitable inquiry. Let those, who undervalue the discoveries of antiquity, only think, what our condition at this day must have been, if, in the ages of darkness that followed the destruction of the Roman empire, all the literary monuments of Greece and Italy had perished. Again, is there any thing productive of utility and pleasure in the fictions of poetry, and in the charms

of harmonious composition? Surely, it cannot be doubted: nor will they, who have any knowledge of the history of learning, hesitate to affirm, that the modern Europeans are almost wholly indebted for the beauty of their writings both in prose and verse to those models of elegance that first appeared in Greece, and have since been admired and imitated all over the western world. It is a striking fact, that while in other parts of the earth there prevails a form of language, so disguised by figures, and so darkened by incoherence, as to be quite unsuitable to philosophy, and even in poetry tiresome, the Europeans should have been so long in possession of a style, in which harmony, perspicuity, simplicity, and elegance, are so happily united. That the Romans and modern Europeans had it from the Greeks, is well known; but whence those fathers of literature derived it, is not so apparent, and would furnish matter for too long a digression, if we were here to inquire. In a word, the Greeks and Romans are our masters in all polite literature; a consideration, which of itself ought to inspire reverence for their writings and genius.

Good translations are very useful; but the best of them will not render the study of the original authors either unnecessary or unprofitable. This might be proved by many arguments.

All living languages are liable to change. The Greek and Latin, though composed of more durable materials than ours, were subject to perpetual vicissitude, till they ceased to be spoken. The former is with reason believed to have been more stationary than any other; and indeed a very particular attention was paid to the preservation of it: yet between Spenser and Pope, Hooker and Sherlock, Raleigh and Smollet, a difference of dialect is not more perceptible, than between Homer and Apollonius, Xenophon and Plutarch, Aristotle and Antoninus. In the Roman authors the change of language is still more remarkable. How different, in this respect, is Ennius from Virgil, Lucilius from Horace, Cato from Columella, and even Catullus from Ovid! The laws of the Twelve Tables, though studied by every Roman of condition, were not perfectly understood even by antiquarians, in the time of Cicero, when they were not quite four hundred years old. Cicero, himself, as well as Lucretius, made several improvements in the Latin tongue; Virgil introduced some new words; and Horace asserts his right to the same privilege; and from his remarks upon it,* appears to have considered the immutability of living lan-

* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 46—72.

guage as an impossible thing. It were vain then to flatter ourselves with the hope of permanency to any of the modern tongues of Europe; which, being more ungrammatical than the Latin and Greek are exposed to more dangerous, because less discernible innovations. Our want of tenses and cases makes a multitude of auxiliary words necessary; and to these the unlearned are not attentive, because they look upon them as the least important parts of language; and hence they come to be omitted or misapplied in conversation and afterwards in writing. Besides, the spirit of commerce, manufacture, and naval enterprise, so honourable to modern Europe, and to Great Britain in particular, and the free circulation of arts, sciences, and opinions, owing in part to the use of printing, and to our improvements in navigation, cannot fail to render the modern tongues, and especially the English, more variable than the Greek or Latin. Much indeed has been done of late to ascertain and fix the English tongue. Johnson's Dictionary is a most important, and considered as the work of one man, a most wonderful performance. It does honour to England, and to human genius: and proves, that there is still left among us a force of mind equal to that which formerly distinguished a Stephanus or a Varro. Its influence in diffusing the know-

ledge of the language, and retarding its decline, is already observable:

Si Pergama dextra

Defendi possent, etiam hac defensa fuissent.

And yet, within the last twenty years, and since this great work was published, a multitude of new words have found their way into the English tongue, and though both unauthorised and unnecessary, seem likely to remain in it.

In this fluctuating state of the modern languages, and of our own in particular, what could we expect from translations, if the study of Greek and Latin were to be discontinued? Suppose all the good books of antiquity translated into English, and the originals destroyed, or, which is nearly the same thing, neglected. The English grows obsolete in one century; and, in two that translation must be retranslated. If there were faults in the first, and I never heard of a faultless translation, they must be multiplied tenfold in the second. So that, within a few centuries, there is reason to fear, that all the old authors would be either lost, or so mangled as to be hardly worth preserving. A system of geometry, one would think, must lose less in a tolerable translation, than any other science. Political ideas are somewhat variable; moral notions are ambiguous in their names at least, if not in themselves;

the abstruser sciences speak a language still more indefinite; but ideas of number and quantity must for ever remain distinct. And yet some late authors have thrown light upon geometry, by reviving the study of the Greek geometers. Let any man read a translation of Cicero and Livy, and then study the author in his own tongue; and he shall find himself not only more delighted with the manner, but also more fully instructed in the matter.

Beauty of style and harmony of verse would decay at the first translation, and at the second or third be quite lost. It is not possible for one who is ignorant of Latin to have any adequate notion of Virgil; the choice of his words, and the modulation of his numbers, have never been copied with tolerable success in any other tongue. Homer, has been of all poets the most fortunate in a translator; his fable, descriptions, and pathos, and for the most part, his characters, we find in Pope: but we find not his simplicity, nor his impetuosity, nor that majestick inattention to the more trivial niceties of style, which is so graceful in him, but which no other poet dares imitate. Homer in Greek seems to sing extempore, and from immediate inspiration, or enthusiasm;*

* "His poems (says a very learned writer) were made to be recited, or sung to a company; and not read in

but in English his phraseology and numbers are not a little elaborate: which I mention, not with any view to detract from the translator, who truly deserves the highest praise, but to show the insufficiency of modern language to convey a just idea of ancient writing. I need not enlarge on this subject: it is well known, that few of the great authors of antiquity have ever been adequately translated. No man who understands Plato, Demosthenes, and Xenophon, in the Greek, or Livy, Cicero, and Virgil, in the Latin, would willingly peruse even the best translations of those authors.

If one mode of composition be better than another, which will scarce be denied, it is surely worth while to preserve a standard of that which ~~is best~~. This cannot be done, but by preserving the original authors; and they cannot be said to be preserved, unless they be studied and understood. Translations are like portraits. They may give some idea of the lineaments and colour, but the life and the motion they cannot copy; and too often, instead of exhibiting the air of the original,

“ private, or perused in a book, which few were then
 “ capable of doing: and I will venture to affirm, that
 “ whoever reads not Homer in this view, loses a great
 “ part of the delight he might receive from the poet.”

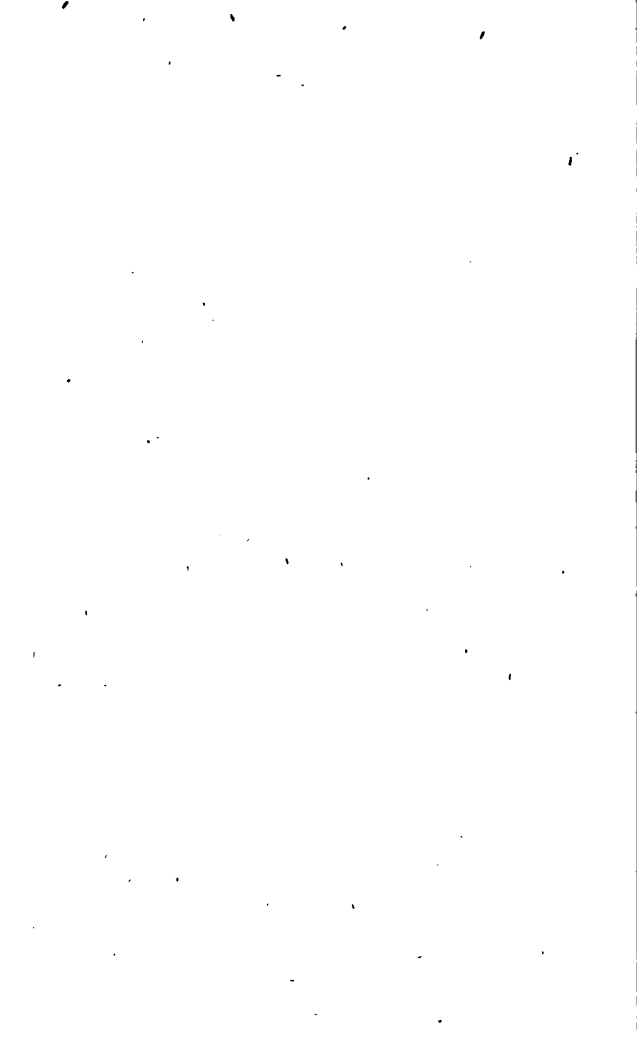
Blackwell's Inquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer,
 p. 122.

they present us with that only which is most agreeable to the taste of the painter. Abolish the originals, and you will soon see the copies degenerate.

There are in England two excellent styles of poetical composition. Milton is our model in the one; Dryden and Pope in the other. Milton formed himself on the ancients, and on the modern Italians who imitate their ancestors of old Rome: Dryden and Pope took the French poets for their pattern, particularly Boileau, who followed the ancients (of whom he was a passionate admirer) as far as the prosaick genius of the French tongue would permit. If we reject the old authors, and take these great moderns for our standard, we do nothing more than copy after a copy. If we reject both, and set about framing new modes of composition, our success will probably be no better than that of the projectors whom Gulliver visited in the metropolis of Balnibarbi.

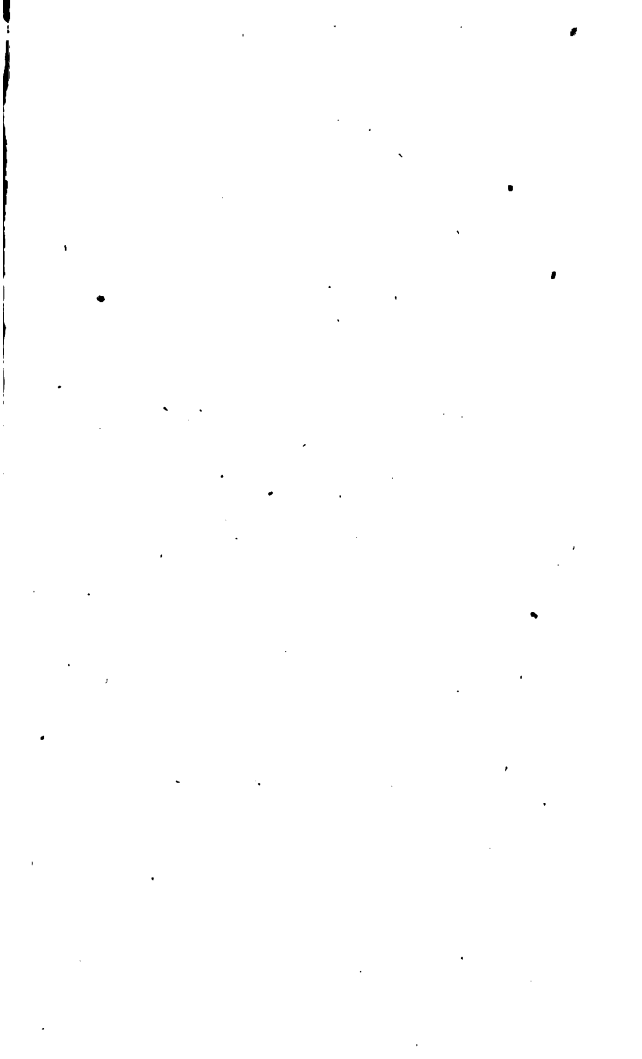
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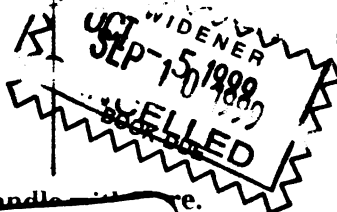
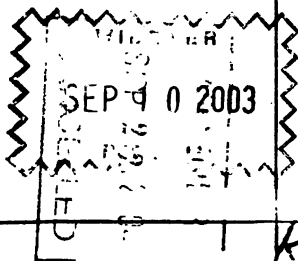


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